The New Criterion

October 2000

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Notes & Comments: October 2000

False advertising

Never underestimate the power of suggestion. Consider France's latest literary sensation, *Les particules élémentaires*. We were prepared to believe, as all the advance publicity led us to believe, that the novel was an attack on what *The New York Times* called (in a piece published last March) "the failed dreams of the 1968 student protest movement." Don't believe a word of it. Advance proofs of *The Elementary Particles* (as Michel Houellebecq's novel is called in English) arrived on our desk recently. Far from being an "attack on everything the 60's generation holds dear" (as a profile of Houellebecq in the *Times*'s magazine of September 10 put it), the book wallows in the sex- and drug-sodden pathology of the 1960s. It is no more an attack on those excesses than was the Woodstock festival or William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.

But Mr. Houellebecq is obviously a man who specializes in misleading impressions. In the long profile in the *Times*, for example, it is suggested that he recently moved from Paris to Dublin the better to enjoy isolation and the oblivion he purchases daily with alcohol and sex. And what better way to assure one's isolation than to grant an interview to a reporter from *The New York Times*? Never mind that Mr. Houellebecq propositioned the reporter, Emily Eakin, or that during dinner he "fell into a drunken stupor, his nodding head eventually landing on his plate next to a smear of mayonnaise." Obviously we have here a literary genius who has gone far to commune alone with his muse.

It is difficult to say which is more repulsive: the withering profile in the *Times* or the book itself. Well, no: let us emend that. *The Elementary Particles*, at two-hundred-and-sixty-some pages, is clearly the more repulsive document. Doubtless it will be a bestseller here, as it is already in France. The book tells the story of Michel and Bruno, half-brothers abandoned by hippie parents. Bruno is an erotomaniacal psychiatric patient; much of the book is taken up with describing his grotesque sexual conquests, failures, and fantasies. Michel is a depressed biologist who, after perfecting a formula for cloning a kind of rational parody of human beings, commits suicide. In an epilogue set some decades in the future, we learn that the whole story has been told by one of these pan-sexual, post-human creatures.

There are obvious parallels to be drawn between *The Elementary Particles* and Huxley's *Brave New World*. But whatever novelistic failings Huxley's book suffered from, it was clearly a work of social and moral criticism. Mr. Houellebecq's book, by contrast, *exploits* the pathologies he describes. The

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endless parade of brutal sex, madness, and self-destruction is meant to titillate not horrify—or, rather, it *is* meant to horrify, but only as part of its basic desire to titillate. There was a time when *The Elementary Particles* would have been dismissed as the worst sort of pornography. That, alas, is a term that has been emptied of content as surely as it has been legally neutralized. This much, however, is clear: *The Elementary Particles* graphically represents a certain type of moral degradation—one that does not challenge but rather epitomizes the nihilism we have inherited from the 1960s.

A worthy enterprise

"Of all horrible religions," G. K. Chesterton remarked in his book *Orthodoxy*, "the most horrible is the worship of the god within." Chesterton (1874–1936) is full of such pungent, discomfiting accuracies. (Here's another favorite, from the same book: "the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.") For more than twenty-five years, the G. K. Chesterton Institute has been publishing *The Chesterton Review*, a quarterly devoted to exploring Chesterton's themes and thought. It is an eminently worthy enterprise. Chesterton's famous penchant for paradox, his impatience with cant, his pugnacious endorsement of unfashionable opinions—all this makes him a worthy ally in the effort to understand and critique the sillinesses of contemporary culture. Chesterton wrote three-quarters of a century ago. But when he speaks about "the false theory of progress, which maintains that we alter the test instead of trying to pass the test," he has a distinctly contemporary relevance. When he observes that "pragmatism is a matter of human needs; and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist," you wish that someone had given Richard Rorty Chesterton instead of Marx to read when he was young and impressionable.

The current, double issue of *The Chesterton Review* (Volume XXVI, Numbers 1 & 2) reprints several brief pieces by Chesterton himself with a large handful of papers delivered at a conference in Houston, Texas, last October on the topic of "The Light Within: The New Age and Christian Spirituality." Although the papers are unfailingly polite, most exhibit a salutary, indeed Chestertonian, skepticism about the merits of so-called New Age spirituality. We recommend in particular "Chesterton and the 'Age of Aquarius'" by John Coates and "From Helen of Troy to Helena Blavatsky" by Harold O. J. Brown. The last word, however, should go to Chesterton. In an excerpt from his *Autobiography* (1936), Chesterton, looking back on his young adulthood, dilates on his dislike of Theosophy:

> Perhaps I did not dislike Theosophy, but only Theosophists. . . . But I did not dislike them because they had erroneous doctrines, when I myself had no doctrines; or because they had no claim to be Christians, when in fact they would have claimed Christianity . . . much more confidently than I could myself. I disliked them because they had shiny pebbly eyes and patient smiles. Their patience mostly consisted of waiting for others to rise to the spiritual plane where they themselves already stood. It is a curious fact, that they never seemed to hope that *they* might evolve and reach the plane where their honest greengrocer already stood.

In an age of political correctness and the smug assumption of virtue—the age of what Joseph Epstein has called the "virtuecrat"—it is a pleasure to turn to pretense-puncturers like Chesterton. The *Review* is a reliable source of this pleasure. Subscriptions may be had from *The Chesterton Review*, c/o the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, Delaware 19807 or by calling (800) 526–7022.

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Does race exist?

Paul R. Gross writes:

The Human Genome Project is on schedule. Its many promised uses, nevertheless, are for the long haul. *The New York Times* tells us, though, that it has already achieved one invaluable result. On August 22, Ms. Natalie Angier announced the glad tidings on page one: *There is no such thing as race*. Her title: "Do Races Differ? Not Really, Genes Show." Race, therefore, is about to join such other "social constructs" as quarks, atoms, motile sperm, and secondary sex characteristics.

Angier's article collects opinion-sentences to that effect from two able leaders of the Genome Project—Dr. Craig Venter (the private branch) and Dr. Eric Lander (the public)—and from several others. All deny the biological reality of "race" among humans. Some fragments refer obliquely to Genome Project results. But separately or together, these statements allow no meaningful judgment on the significance of race, even from a geneticist or an anthropologist. The piece does mention in passing "a handful of researchers who continue to insist that there are fundamental differences among the three major races that extend to the brain."

If, as claimed, races are not biologically significant, then they don't exist. "Race" means biological difference. (And if races don't exist, then there aren't "three major races.") If a mere "handful of researchers . . . continue to insist" that race means something biological, then the rest do not. So they regard all people as siblings who start life with the same endowment, including brains. Any differences we see or measure are then trivial or social. That is the *Times*'s message. It doesn't work for anyone who knows what "race" means in science, and what the genetic data show.

Forty years ago, the distinguished evolutionist Ernst Mayr discarded "typological" notions from contemporary biological systematics. The difference was (and still is) important because of the then-stubborn remnants of idealism in biology and because advances in genetics had rendered the timeworn notion of fixed, racial "types" not even wrong, just irrelevant. In his 1959 essay "Typological Versus Population Thinking," Mayr wrote:

> Essentially . . . [the typological idea of "race"] asserts that every representative of a race conforms to the type and is separated from the representatives of any other race by a distinct gap. The populationist also recognizes races but in totally different terms. Race for him is based on the simple fact that no two individuals are the same in sexually reproducing organisms and that consequently no two aggregates of individuals can be the same. If the average difference between two groups of individuals is sufficiently great to be recognizable on sight, we refer to such groups of individuals as different races. *Race, thus described, is a universal phenomenon of nature occurring not only in man but in two thirds of all species of animals and plants*. [Emphasis added.]

That is what biological "race" means—*except*, in recent decades, for humanity. Many argue, by whatever means come to hand, that while there are races (or "varieties," or "demes," or "breeding groups") in other species, humanity has none, that group differences are either trivial or sociocultural. This accelerating assault upon what seems obvious raises two broad questions. First, why the current fussing over "race" in humans? And why drag in "the brain"? Second, what evidence—from the Genome Project or otherwise—supports this radical claim? (It is radical; people can distinguish, sometimes imperfectly, at least those "three major" human groups—African, Asian, Caucasian.)

Race is a battleground of politics. So, today, is science, with enemies at both ends of the political spectrum. Therefore, like the nexus religion/science, race/science is fertile ground for politics and prejudice, and eve-

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rybody has politics and prejudice. Now, the surest way to extinguish flare-ups of race/science is to deny that there is any science in "race" and to assert that group differences are social (and politically malleable). Of course, most people think the opposite, intuitively.

Yet we are familiar with counterintuitive science that is true. So there being "no biological reality" in race is a possibility. Certainly it is useful and comforting for respectable people, including scientists—they depend upon public good will and most have currently respectable politics. And the brain? That's the touchiest of all race/science issues! It is considered crude to say that one race seems to have *innate* advantages in certain sports, but one does think it. But it is indecent, today, even to think of innate cognitive differences, however small, among races. That can cost you friends or your job.

What about evidence? It has long been clear that the gross genetic makeup (as DNA sequence) of humans and, say, chimpanzees differs hardly at all. A few percent at most. Nobody doubts that this makes a huge biological difference, or that the difference depends upon scores of genes. But we and chimps are different species. Within a species, DNA differences overall are even smaller, race to race. For the kinds of genes studied until recently population-wide (for example, blood groups), within-group gene variability can be greater than between groups. None of this means that varieties are not biologically different. A small subset of genes, relative to the multiple tens of thousands in a genome, can make enormous differences in the functioning body (the phenotype). That has been the salient outcome of developmental genetics. "Innate" characteristics can be and some are known to be encoded in an insignificant fraction of the genome. Every competent developmentalist knows this.

For the Human Genome Project, turning its splendid accomplishment into specific gene functions, and then into phenotypes, is in the future. Nothing new has happened —yet—to relegate group-related biological traits to the trash heap. We already know some such traits. What has been reinforced is what we've known for decades: real differences among the human varieties float upon an ocean of physiological (hence genetic) uniformity. But that's just what makes us all human.

From the archives of the academy:

Dear Colleagues,

This is a follow-up email to one I sent you earlier this summer, requesting that you send me the names of women and minority group grad students in your program who will be on the job market this fall.

I am writing to gently nudge you in the direction of sending me the relevant names ASAP. It is now a policy at UW-Madison that departments must submit a list of possible candidates in these two categories before they are given permission to do a search. So we can't run an ad in JFP before we have this list in hand.

Thanks for your cooperation on this (and my apologies to those who already responded).

An e-mail circulated to the department of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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The genius of Wodehouse

by Roger Kimball

Although it is shocking to report, candor requires that I begin by acknowledging that it was not until 1982, when I was in my late twenties, that I first acquainted myself with the sublime work of Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse.

I remember the occasion vividly. I was recovering from the effects of oral surgery after a botched root canal. Thanks to some tablets prescribed by my doctor, I passed a few days lying on a sofa in a not unpleasant sort of semi-coma, almost forgetting the excavation site on the gum above my abused molar. Leafing through *The Times Literary Supplement* as I mended, I paused over a review of Frances Donaldson's biography of Wodehouse. It sounded like good stuff.

It was (as Wodehouse himself might have put it) the work of a moment to nip down to the local bookstore, pick up a volume or two, and nip back to my bed of modified woe. Anyone inclined to doubt the workings of Providence should attend closely to what happened next. Of the dozens of Wodehouse titles available, the one I first opened was *Carry On, Jeeves* (1925), a masterly collection of stories whose first chapter explains how that unsurpassable valet, the brainy Jeeves, came into the employ of the feckless chump Bertie Wooster:

> Lots of people think I'm much too dependent on him. My Aunt Agatha, in fact, has even gone so far as to call him my keeper. Well, what I say is: Why not? The man's a genius. From the collar upward he stands alone. I gave up trying to run my own affairs within a week of his coming to me.

Wodehouse (the name, by the way, is pronounced "Woodhouse") was amazingly prolific; as Frances Donaldson notes, no one knows the exact extent of his output because, when young, he often wrote under other people's names or noms de plume. But we do know that over the course of his ninety-three years he wrote at least ninety-six books, wrote or collaborated on sixteen plays, and composed at least some of the lyrics and/or the book for twenty-eight musicals. The man was a writing machine. And although he often wrote at or near the top of his form, surely it was (as the Marxists say) no accident that I should have stumbled onto one of his supreme masterpieces right off the bat. These things must be fated. When St. Augustine was going through a rough patch and he heard some children chanting *tolle lege*—"take and read"—he picked up the Bible and it changed his life.

I won't say that my discovery of Wodehouse was quite so earth-shaking, but it was serendipitous. After two or three pages I was hooked. Had my doctor seen me then, convulsed as I was with laughter, he doubtless would have looked askance and confiscated those tablets. But Wodehouse, if addictive, is an innocent, indeed a beneficent, addiction. Although I came to him late, I

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have made up for that tardiness with unwavering devotion. No writer has given me more merriment and delight. It was naturally with great pleasure, then, that I greeted the announcement that the Everyman Library was bringing out a handsome hardcover edition of Wodehouse's novels and stories.[1] The first four volumes—including three masterpieces, *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934), *The Code of the Woosters* (1938), and *Pigs Have Wings* (1952)—were published last spring. Five more—including the superlative *Summer Lightning* (1929) and *The Mating Season* (1949)—are scheduled to be published later this fall. This is the first uniform edition of Wodehouse to appear, and it is long overdue.

Oscar Wilde said that he put his genius into his life and only his talent into his work. Wodehouse upped the ante and put everything into his work. Everyone who knew Wodehouse described him as excessively shy. When his wife set out to get a flat in New York, Wodehouse asked her to be sure it was on the ground floor because he never knew what to say to the lift boy. In 1939, Oxford gave him an honorary degree; when at a dinner following the ceremony the crowd began to shout "We want Wodehouse," he just barely managed to get to his feet and mumble "thank you."

Wodehouse was kindly and well-meaning; he was also irretrievably dull. And definitely not funny. Donaldson says Wodehouse was "a genuine recluse and socially incompetent." "I loathe clubs," said the inventor of the Drones Club in 1956. In matters of haberdashery, the creator of the impeccably turned out Psmith took after the shabby Lord Emsworth. When he suffered a small stroke in 1951, Wodehouse wandered in a dazed state into a doctor's office on Park Avenue. "A bum came into my office," the doctor reported: arrangements were being made to have him sent to Bellevue when a secretary, going through his pockets in an effort to identify the mystery man, announced, "He's not a bum, he's an Englishman!" Bellevue was scratched in favor of Doctor's Hospital, a private institution. Donaldson concluded that the key to Wodehouse's character lay "in his inability to feel strong emotions." Wodehouse might well have agreed. "I haven't got any violent feelings about anything," he said in a 1961 interview. "I just love writing."

As it happens, Donaldson—the daughter of the playwright Frederick Lonsdale—came to Wodehouse even later than I did. She knew the master personally, having been a close friend of Leonora, Wodehouse's beloved stepdaughter (who died in her late thirties in 1943). But it was not until Donaldson was seventy that she "got" Wodehouse. She then sat down and read through virtually the entire corpus in a couple of years. Her biography (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, now out of print) is simply splendid. It is well-written, well-informed, admiring but by no means hagiographical. Donaldson claims that of ten confirmed Wodehouse addicts, only one will be a woman; "women as a whole," she says, do not care for the sort of "masculine fantasy" he specialized in. My own informants take issue with that judgment. But it is hard to imagine a better biography of this peculiar man.

Wodehouse's father was a magistrate in Hong Kong. His mother was staying with a sister in Guildford when P. G., the third of her four sons, was born in 1881. There were some glittering antecedents. The family could trace itself back to the sister of Anne Boleyn; and Cardinal Newman was a great uncle on his mother's side. There had, however, been a considerable falling off. Donaldson describes Wodehouse's mother as a "stupid woman" whose "actions continually suggest that her emotions were as undeveloped as her intellect." She certainly seems not to have been overly burdened by the maternal instinct. The infant Wodehouse returned with her to Hong Kong, but was shipped back to England with his

1 Complete at eighty volumes in England where the books will cost £9.99 each. In America, an abbreviated edition of some forty volumes is being published by Overlook Press at $15.95 per volume.

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older brothers two years later to be brought up by a Miss Roper, a complete stranger. Wodehouse grew up being passed from aunt to aunt, a fact that has been made much of by those seeking personal correlatives for the formidable aunts who populate his books. ("It is no use telling me that there are bad aunts and good aunts," we read in *The Code of the Woosters*. "At the core they are all alike. Sooner or later out pops the cloven hoof.")

Wodehouse went to school at Dulwich College, where he did well at games, especially cricket. At first he worked hard at his studies, but when it transpired that there would not be enough money to send him to university, his attention drifted. But he had loved Dulwich: "To me, the years between 1894 and 1900 were like heaven." After leaving school, he worked briefly at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in London: it was an uncongenial experience. He had begun writing at the age of seven: it was the thing he was born to do. He began contributing to numerous papers and magazines and had published his first book by 1902.

In later life, Wodehouse was universally known as "Plum" or "Plummie." As he explained in the preface to *Something Fresh* (1915), the first of the Blandings Castle novels, in those days a writer in America who "went about without three names was practically going around naked." So the Pelham Grenville, he thought, helped his early career. But he never liked the names: "I have my dark moods when they seem to me about as low as you can get. At the font I remember protesting vigorously when the clergyman uttered them, but he stuck to his point. 'Be that as it may,' he said firmly, having waited for a lull, 'I name thee Pelham Grenville.'"

Fans of the Blandings Castle stories will be interested to learn that after Dulwich, Plum spent time visiting a friend at a school called Emsworth House in a village of the same name; the friend was Herbert Westbrook, an inveterate sponger who was the model for Ukridge (pronounced to rhyme with "Duckridge"). Wodehouse rented a house there called Threepwood—Lord Emsworth's family name—and in 1905 acquired a car with what amounted to a year's wages. Like one of his characters, he promptly succeeded in driving it into a ditch. "He left the car there," Donaldson tells us, "and never drove again." Jeeves, we learn, is named for a Warwickshire cricketer called Percy Jeeves, though Wodehouse first thought of his most famous character after reading Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles of Red Gap*, which features a super-competent butler.

Wodehouse made his first trip to America in 1904 and by 1909 was coming regularly. In August of 1914, Wodehouse met a young widow named Ethel Newton in New York. By the end of September, they were married—quick service for a shy chap, you might say, but probably instigated more by Ethel than the retiring Plum. Ethel was not the brains of the family, exactly, but she was clearly its senior management: treasurer, executive secretary, and CEO. She took entire charge of Wodehouse's affairs, and, Donaldson observes, "stood between him and the rest of the world in all things, except those which most immediately concerned his work."

Sex is conspicuous by its absence in Wodehouse's work. (Some of his early stories attempt to include a love interest: the effort is always embarrassing.) As Richard Usborne, author of the excellent *Wodehouse at Work* (1961) noted, "There is no suggestion that either clubman or girl would recognize a double bed except as so much extra sweat to make an apple-pie of." How far this attitude extended into Wodehouse's life is uncertain. Donaldson rightly observes that "Wodehouse may or may not have been inhibited sexually as well as emotionally and this inhibition may have been partial or complete. Not a matter on which one is ever likely to have exact evidence, it is in this case not one which matters very much."

In 1914, Wodehouse had yet to hit his stride. When he married Ethel, he had exactly $100 in the bank. By the 1920s he was earning $100,000 per annum from his

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books and his work in the theater. (Although not much noticed today, Wodehouse's theater work, much of it done in collaboration with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern, was extraordinarily successful.) In 1929, he went to Hollywood, where he was paid $2000 a week to be a rewrite man—money for jam, as he might have put it. He was socking the stuff away. Wodehouse himself was the opposite of mercenary. As long as he had some pipe tobacco and could be left alone with his typewriter he was happy. But, then as now, the Internal Revenue Service couldn't look at a pile of money without wanting a good bit of it, and in 1932 the first of several tax imbroglios ensued. Donaldson notes that in all his tangles with the IRS and England's Inland Revenue, Wodehouse "either won or achieved a compromise settlement in his favor." In 1934, partly to escape the badgering tax authorities, he and Ethel acquired a villa in Le Touquet on the coast of France, which became their home base for several years. They were there in 1939 when World War II started. They were still there the next year when the Germans rolled through and appropriated the villa, confiscated much of their property, and interned Wodehouse.

Wodehouse was in various German camps for about a year; he was released in 1941 just shy of his sixtieth birthday and was allowed to go to Berlin. It was there that he recorded five radio talks to be broadcast to America and England. The talks themselves were completely innocuous:

> Young men, starting out in life, have often asked me "How can I become an Internee?" Well, there are several methods. My own was to buy a villa in Le Touquet on the coast of France and stay there until the Germans came along. This is probably the best and simplest system. You buy the villa and the Germans do the rest.

But the response back home was not at all amused. It was first put about that Wodehouse had agreed to do the broadcasts in exchange for his release; this turned out not to be true. It didn't matter. William Connor, writing as "Cassandra" in the *Daily Mirror*, excoriated Wodehouse as a quisling. Broadcasting later on the BBC, Connor began: "I have come to tell you tonight the story of a rich man trying to make his last and greatest sale—that of his own country." Donaldson devotes about a third of her book to these broadcasts and their aftermath. Her conclusion was the conclusion of the officials who investigated the episode after the war: The broadcasts were ill-advised, certainly, but "Wodehouse did not betray his country: he spoke no word of propaganda, he did no deal."

Again, it didn't matter. Wodehouse was awarded a knighthood in 1975, two months before he died (on Valentine's Day, which seems somehow appropriate). But many who faulted him for the broadcasts never forgave him. After the war, Wodehouse settled permanently in America, first in New York City, then in Remsenburg, Long Island. There was no assurance, had he returned to London, that he would not have been prosecuted. In 1953, Wodehouse was induced to give lunch to William Connor. It tells us a lot about Wodehouse's character that he became fast friends with a man who had caused him so much damage. "We got on together like a couple of sailors on shore leave," Wodehouse reported in a letter. "We parted on christian name terms, vowing eternal friendship."

Donaldson is doubtless right that Wodehouse was "socially incompetent." He was also one of the most accomplished prose writers of the century. High praise. But it is entirely in keeping with the encomia Wodehouse's work has elicited over the years. In a radio broadcast from 1934, Hilaire Belloc called him "the best writer of English now alive . . . the head of my profession." That remark loosed an avalanche of inquiries: What could Belloc have meant by such extravagant commendation for a writer of what, after all, are only light comedies? A few years later, in a preface for a chrestomathy called *Week-end Wodehouse*

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(1939, and still in print), Belloc elaborated:

> Writing is a craft, like any other: playing the violin, skating, batting at cricket, billiards, wood carving . . . ; and mastership in any craft is attainment of the end to which that craft is devoted. . . . The end of writing is the production of a certain image and a certain emotion. And the means towards that end are the use of words in any particular language; and the complete use of that medium is the choosing of the right words and the putting of them into the right order. It is *this* which Mr. Wodehouse does better, in the English language, than anyone else alive.

Belloc particularly admired Wodehouse's similes, citing as an example his description of Honoria Glossop as "one of those robust, dynamic girls with the muscles of a welterweight and a laugh like a squadron of cavalry charging over a tin bridge."

Evelyn Waugh shared Belloc's high opinion. Reviewing *Week-end Wodehouse*, he praised Belloc for treating Wodehouse "as he deserves, soberly and seriously, as a prose stylist and as the expression of a culture for the safety of which Mr. Belloc feels anxiety." Waugh admired Wodehouse partly for "the exquisite felicity of his language," partly for the incorrigible innocence of his vision. Quoting Wodehouse's remark that "Jeeves knows his place, and it is between the covers of a book," Waugh underscored the purely literary quality of Wodehouse's characters and the world they inhabit.

> We do not concern ourselves with the economic implications of their position; we are not skeptical about their quite astonishing celibacy. We do not expect them to grow any older, like the Three Musketeers or the Forsytes. We are not interested in how they would "react to changing social conditions" as publishers' blurbs invite us to be interested in other sagas. They are untroubled by wars (Jeeves first appeared . . . in 1917, and Bertie Wooster, then unquestionably of military age, was "in the dreamless" at 11:30 A.M.). . . . They all live, year after year, in their robust middle twenties; their only sickness is an occasional hangover. It is a world that cannot become dated because it has never existed.

In "An Act of Homage and Reparation to P. G. Wodehouse" (1961), Waugh came back to this point. Bertie Wooster, like other Wodehouse characters, "inhabits a world as timeless as that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Alice in Wonderland*." Waugh stressed that Wodehouse characters are not, as is sometimes said, "survivals of the Edwardian age. They are creations of pure fancy. . . . The Drones [Club], with its swimming bath and its smoking concerts, its "Old Beans" and "Old Crumpets" touching one another for fivers, has no correspondence at all with any London club of any period."

The central oddity of Wodehouse's artistry is its purity, which means in part its distance from the cares and concerns of ordinary human life. In her biography, Donaldson observes that "no humour is consistently funny which is not related to human life." Perhaps so. But Wodehouse reminds us of the irony that one way of being related to human life is by bracketing its everyday imperatives. To some extent, that is something all art does. Wodehouse does it more radically, and with greater virtuosity, than almost anyone. In a memorial piece from 1975, Bernard Levin observed that "it is difficult to find comparisons that do not jar, because [Wodehouse's] matter was so utterly unlike that of his true peers of manner, and none of those whose matter was recognizably similar to his could write like him." It is silly to compare him to Shakespeare or Swift or Rabelais (to pick a few favorites from the literature on Wodehouse). But lesser touchstones seem somehow unfair to his excellences.

Those excellences do not fully emerge in short quotations. Wodehouse was not a coiner of epigrams. (Though he did come up with some great lines. Here are a few famous ones: "Slice him where you like, a hellhound is always a hellhound." "I could see that, if not actually disgruntled, he was

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far from being gruntled." And this gem about understanding the gist of an argument: "He followed me like a leopard.") Wodehouse's real genius lay in his ability to endow patently absurd situations with momentary conviction.

Many of the Bertie and Jeeves stories involve extricating Bertie from a matrimonial engagement that he (or sometimes Jeeves) deems inadvisable. A frequent subplot involves some article of Bertie's clothing that doesn't pass muster with Jeeves. In "Jeeves Takes Charge," Bertie is more or less happily engaged to Florence Craye, a frightful bluestocking with a "wonderful profile" who was "particularly keen on boosting [Bertie] up a bit nearer her own plane of intellect." Bertie's usual reading matter, insofar as he has any, does not depart far from mystery novels of the pulpier sort. But Florence has him ploughing through a book called *Types of Ethical Theory*. Still, "seen sideways," as Bertie says, she was "most awfully good looking."

Florence threatens to break off their engagement unless Bertie can destroy the manuscript of his Uncle Willoughby's "Recollections of a Long Life," a gossipy trove with horrid things about everyone he knew when young, including Florence's father. "You may look upon it as a test, Bertie." she says, "If you have the resource and courage to carry this thing through, I will take it as evidence that you are not the vapid and shiftless person most people think you."

Bertie fails, of course, largely because Jeeves sees to it that the manuscript finds its way to the publisher. At first, he is so outraged that he fires Jeeves. Gradually, however, he changes his mind. "It was her intention," Jeeves had told him, "to start you almost immediately upon Nietzsche. You would not like Nietzsche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound." The story ends with this exchange:

> "Oh, Jeeves," I said; "about that check suit."
>
> "Yes, sir?"
>
> "Is it really a frost?"
>
> "A trifle too bizarre, sir, in my opinion."
>
> "But lots of fellows have asked me who my tailor is."
>
> "Doubtless in order to avoid him, sir."
>
> "He's supposed to be one of the best men in London."
>
> "I am saying nothing against his moral character, sir."
>
> I hesitated a bit. I had a feeling that I was passing into this chappie's clutches. . . . "All right, Jeeves," I said, "You know! Give the bally thing away to sombody!"
>
> He looked down at me like a father gazing tenderly at the wayward child.
>
> "Thank you, sir. I gave it to the under-gardener last night. A little more tea, sir?"

Silly. Preposterous. Absurd. But as Wilde's Algernon said about a similar absurdity, perfectly phrased.

To canvass Wodehouse for quotable scenes is to be in the position of a child in a candy store. And I don't mean one of those small, village operations, with only a shelf of sweets. I mean a large, multi-storied emporium stuffed to the gills with toothsome morsels. Consider, for example, the golf stories and the tales spun by Mr. Mulliner at the Anglers' Rest and the character of Monty Bodkin. In my opinion, one of Wodehouse's greatest novels is *Leave it to Psmith* (1924). Unaccountably, the book is somewhat slighted in The Literature. It is accorded respect but not the wild enthusiasm it deserves. Perhaps its reappearance in the Everyman series will correct that error. When we are introduced to Ronald (or Rupert—Wodehouse wasn't quite sure) Eustace Psmith, he has fallen on hard times. Nevertheless the "very tall, very thin, very solemn young man" cuts a striking figure in his "speckless top hat and a morning-coat of irreproachable fit." He is on his way through a run-down neighborhood to visit the wife of his school friend Mike Jackson.

> A small maid-of-all work appeared in answer to the bell, and stood transfixed as the visitor, producing a monocle, placed it in his right eye and inspected her through it.
>
> "A warm afternoon," he said cordially.

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"Yes, sir."

"But pleasant," urged the young man. "Tell me, is Mrs. Jackson at home?"

"No, sir."

"Not at home?"

"No, sir."

The young man sighed.

"Ah, well," he said, "we must always remember that these disappointments are sent to us for some good purpose. No doubt they make us more spiritual. Will you inform her that I called. The name is Psmith. P-smith."

"Peasmith, sir?"

"No, no. P-s-m-i-t-h. I should explain to you that I started life without the initial letter, and my father always clung ruggedly to the plain Smith. But it seemed to me that there were so many Smiths in the world that a little variety might well be introduced. Smythe I look on as a cowardly evasion, nor do I approve of the too prevalent custom of tacking another name on in front by means of a hyphen. So I decided to adopt the Psmith. The p, I should add for your guidance, is silent, as in phthisis, psychic, and ptarmigan. You follow me?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"You don't think," he said anxiously, "that I did wrong in pursuing this course?"

"N-no, sir."

Splendid!" said the young man, flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve. "Splendid! Splendid!"

After various vicissitudes, Psmith winds up at Blandings Castle impersonating the modern poet Ralston McTodd. A diamond necklace has been stolen. The efficient Baxter, Lord Emsworth's secretary and Psmith's nemesis, suddenly has the idea that it may be hidden in one of the flowerpots on the terrace. It is after 2:00 A.M. when he starts digging, strikingly attired in lemon-colored pyjamas; it is getting on to dawn when he realizes that he is locked out of the castle and wakes his employer by hurling flowerpots through his bedroom window. Suspecting that his secretary has gone off his rocker, Lord Emsworth rouses Psmith and brings him along to confront Baxter.

Lord Emsworth adjusted his glasses.

"Your face is dirty," he said, peering down at his dishevelled secretary. "Baxter, my dear fellow, your face is dirty."

"I was digging," replied Baxter sullenly.

"What?"

"Digging!"

"The terrier complex," explained Psmith. "What," he asked kindly, turning to his companion, "were you digging for? Forgive me if the question seems an impertinent one, but we are naturally curious."

Well, Baxter is eventually sent packing, but not before he exposes Psmith as an impersonator. Psmith explains that he did it to save Lord Emsworth embarrassment. When Emsworth mistook him for McTodd at the Senior Conservative Club in London, Psmith decided to step into the breach and save the dreamy peer from the "inconvenience of having to return here without a McTodd of any description."

His lordship digested this explanation in silence. Then he seized on a magnificent point.

"Are you a member of the Senior Conservative Club?"

"Most certainly."

"Why, then, dash it," cried his lordship, paying to that august stronghold of respectability as striking a tribute as it had ever received, "if you're a member of the Senior Conservative, you can't be a criminal. Baxter's an ass!"

"Exactly."

When Psmith suggests that he stay on and take over Baxter's position as secretary, Lord Emsworth asks if he has had any experience. Psmith admits that he hasn't, adding that until recently his family was well-to-do and owned a local pile called Corfby Hall.

"Corfby Hall! Are you the son of the Smith who used to own Corfby Hall? Why, bless my soul, I knew your father well."

"Really?"

"Yes. That is to say, I never met him."

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> "No?"
>
> "But I won the first prize at the Shrewsbury Flower Show the year he won the prize for tulips."
>
> "It seems to draw us very close together," said Psmith.

In many ways, Wodehouse achieved what Flaubert aspired to do: to write a novel about nothing.

Wodehouse achieved his effects through a combination of flawless diction and fastidious plotting. Not that there is anything original about his plots. On the contrary, he tells the same handful of stories over and over again. Even many of his characters are interchangeable. In his preface to *Summer Lightning*, Wodehouse mentions "a certain critic" who "made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained 'all the old Wodehouse characters under different names.'" Wodehouse cheerfully owned the charge; that critic, he wrote,

> has probably by now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha: but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. Pretty silly it will make him feel, I rather fancy.

In fact, Wodehouse's success in retelling the same few stories is a further testimony to his skill. It is a matter of success through limitation. As the English critic Ernest Newman observed in 1956, Wodehouse was

> the last perfect representative of a once great race of artists—the practitioners of the commedia dell'arte. These people did not trouble about anything so easy as inventing new forms, new settings, new characters. They took the standardized characters of Pulcinella, Scaramouche, Harlequin, the Captain, the Doctor, the Notary, and so on and re-created them afresh each time out of the abundance of their own genius. This was really a much harder thing to do than to invent quasi-new beings with names and place them in new situations.

Another measure of Wodehouse's skill was the expert way he handled clichés. He knew just how to deploy them for maximum humor. Typically, he cut them in two. Like Caesar, his motto was divide and conquer. "If Uncle George wants to marry waitresses," Bertie tells Jeeves, "let him, say I. I hold that rank is but the penny stamp—." "Guinea stamp, sir." "All right, guinea stamp. Though I don't believe there is such a thing." Wodehouse's mastery of the cliché was inseparable from his celebrated use of literary quotations: Burns above, but primarily from Shakespeare and the Bible, and also from Kipling, Omar Khayyám, Bret Harte, and others. Wodehouse's penchant for literary allusion has led some people to commend his erudition. In fact, as Donaldson notes, his stock of references was actually quite small. Wodehouse did have a classical education, but he himself drew attention to the importance of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, "that indispensable adjunct to literary success." He was not a scholar, much less was he an intellectual: a class of people that he rather feared and disliked but that he nevertheless managed to entertain mightily.

Wodehouse understood perfectly what he was about. "I believe," he remarked in an oft-quoted letter to his friend William Townend, "there are only two ways of writing a novel. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going down deep into life and not caring a damn." Most great artists plumb the depths; Wodehouse remained fixed, gloriously, on the surface. That was both his limitation and his achievement. What he lacked in profundity he made up for in verbal dexterity. His province was humor: he didn't trespass into other realms. He came bearing pleasure, not insight. A master of incongruity, Wodehouse left anguish and betrayal, self-knowledge and social awareness to other, generally lesser, talents.

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Proust regained

by Daniel Mark Epstein

This has been a good year for Proust, for seasoned Proustians as well as aspiring readers of his masterwork, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. We have two new biographies, not including Jean-Yves Tadié's superb *Marcel Proust: A Life*, hailed in France in 1996 and recently published here in English, and we have Roger Shattuck's *Proust's Way*, condensing into a portable volume the professor's useful ideas from his earlier critical works.[1]

All this Proustiana has brought a flood of daily reviews and commentary, amusing in what it scarcely conceals: how few people have actually read the novel. Our journalists are increasingly inclined, or seem obliged, to call *A la recherche* the greatest novel of the twentieth century, taking their cue perhaps from Graham Greene's comment that "Proust was the greatest novelist of the twentieth century, just as Tolstoy was in the nineteenth."

But the consensus is mystical, mired in longing and embarrassed ignorance. I was happier when they were calling *Ulysses* the greatest, though I prefer Proust to Joyce, because that sounded more sincere. I do not know personally ten people who have read Proust's novel whole, and yet the work cannot really be appreciated any other way. Like a cathedral, it must be seen from all points of the compass, and from inside and out, to understand its perfections. The second-best read man I know has not read *A la recherche* (though he has enjoyed the first volume, *Swann's Way*) for the compelling reason that he has not had time to study its four-thousand pages. They are not for speed reading. At twenty pages per hour, the trip takes two-hundred hours. In that time you might peruse *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Bleak House*, and *Middlemarch*, and still have time left over for several James novellas. No one is advised to read Proust's masterpiece before those other books.

Most well-educated people have not finished *A la recherche* for the same reason that most well-traveled people have not visited Antarctica: it is a long and expensive journey of uncertain value. Reports are unreliable. Whom do we trust to advise us to go or stay home? No one who has really been there wants to think he has wasted his time. So he will lavish upon the remote continent the most extravagant praises, sure that no one at the party will protest, calling Proust the Rembrandt, the Beethoven, the Einstein of prose fiction, praises befitting the effort of the journey. Those who have given it up in mid-career, like Aldous Huxley, returning

1 *Marcel Proust*, by Edmund White; Viking, 165 pages, $19.95.
Marcel Proust: A Life, by William C. Carter; Yale University Press, 1024 pages, $35.
Marcel Proust: A Life, by Jean-Yves Tadié; Viking, 1052 pages, $40.
Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time, by Roger Shattuck; W. W. Norton and Co., 288 pages, $26.95.

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with tales of disappointment and disgust, are even less to be trusted. They have not been there.

So we bide our time, hoping for the leisure to read Proust, all of his mysterious novel, and find out things for ourselves. And, if life is generous, the time comes while one still has the eyesight and concentration to appreciate the peaks and caverns of this rangy masterpiece.

Although I dislike the fashion of criticism that diverts attention from a book toward the critic's own experience, in discussing Proust that mode seems unavoidable. He himself invites this sort of reflection, indeed he insists upon it in volume VII, *Time Regained*:

> I thought more modestly of my book and it would be inaccurate even to say that I thought of those who would read it as 'my' readers. For, it seemed to me that they would not be 'my' readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers—it would be my book but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves.

The more valuable recent writings about Proust, such as Edmund White's incisive monograph with its homosexual emphasis, are those with a well-defined voice and point of view. Putting aside for a moment the superiority of Jean-Yves Tadié's scholarship (he was the editor of the Pléiade edition of Proust's work), the overwhelming reason to choose his biography over William C. Carter's very good one is that Tadié is a Frenchman, completely at home in the complex culture that spawned the genius of Illiers/Combray. Tadié's personality is immediately evident in his sentences, in the interplay of the concrete and the abstract: "A life can be interpreted like a sonata or a play: so it is better to imitate la Berma and choose a transparent, invisible approach. Which is not to say that the writing of it would suffer: style is made up of sacrifices." It is not hard to imagine M. Tadié himself, witty, proud, and a trifle long-winded, as a character in *The Guermantes Way*. Next to him, Professor Carter sounds like a polite, well-informed tourist or American tour guide, deferential, discreet, anonymous. You may go to Professor Carter for the facts, but why do that when for the same price you can get from M. Tadié the facts and the feelings?

Proust was born in 1871, the son of an eminent Catholic doctor and his Jewish wife. Marcel and his brother, Robert, two years younger, grew up in the family home in Paris near the Champs-Elysées, spending holidays with relatives in the country towns of Auteuil and Illiers. These provided material for the creation of Proust's fictional village, Combray. At the age of nine, the boy suffered his first asthma attack. In 1882 he entered the Lycée Condorcet where he excelled in literature and philosophy. After a year in the army as a subofficer, in 1890 he studied law and political science at the Sorbonne. During the 1890s Proust began publishing stories and essays in newspapers and literary reviews. Despite his bourgeois background, the handsome, charming young writer climbed into the highest circles of French society, among the aristocratic families of the Faubourg St. Germain. He published his first book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, in 1896, and about the same time he began translating the work of John Ruskin, who had an enormous impact on Proust's style.

The deaths of his father in 1903 and his mother in 1905 left Proust a wealthy man, but he was so depressed after his mother died that he spent time in a sanatorium. Proust's most fulfilling relationship had been with his mother; he is not known to have had any romantic intimacies lasting much longer than a year. He soon gave up his social life, moving to an apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann with a cork-lined room from which he rarely stirred, fearful of the asthmatic and nervous attacks which left him helpless, and determined to devote every waking hour to the composition of

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the novel that would become *A la recherche*. Tadié has reconstructed the process by which a book of essays, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, in 1909, metamorphosed into the autobiographical novel that Proust called *Intermittences du coeur* before naming it *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Professor Carter acknowledges his debt to Tadié (the unrivalled authority on the composition of Proust's novel) in dozens of footnotes, not to mention naming his book after Tadié's. Did Carter know the French scholar's eponymous book would appear in English only months after his own was published? He is fortunate, I think, that Tadié's did not come out first. In Tadié's discussion of the friendship between the twenty-seven-year-old Proust and the poet Anna de Noailles, he quotes from her letter in the six-volume *Correspondance générale*—the best word-portrait of the young Proust I have ever read:

> Marcel Proust in his happy, active, listless youth: his beautiful eyes like a Japanese nightingale—a gaze filled with brown and golden liqueur—are questioning, as if hanging on some delightful and charming piece of advice that he seems to be eagerly expecting from us. . . . Marcel Proust was not asking questions, he did not obtain information through contact with his friends. It was he himself who, in meditative silence, was posing questions to himself. . . . Even though his manner and the sound of his voice were extremely gentle, his conversation abounded in affirmations and no one could be more spontaneous, or was less doubtful of the truth. He said what he believed, he poked judicious fun at other people's tastes, he made up his mind . . . and did not worry about being judged himself. He would have defended his convictions against the whole world.

It is the perfectly apposite quote that makes Marcel come alive in Tadié's chapter. Not only is this passage absent from Carter's book, but the *Correspondance générale* (edited by Proust's brother, Robert) is not even included in Carter's bibliography.

When I was a boy, the English translation of Proust's novel was called *Remembrance of Things Past*, a lovely but false title which the Scotsman C. K. Scott Moncrieff cribbed from Shakespeare's sonnet xxx: "When to the seasons of sweet silent thought/ I summon up remembrance of things past." It has been difficult to give the title up, though anyone with a smattering of French has always known it was wrong. But I am so grateful for the revisions of the translation now called *In Search of Lost Time*, first by Terence Kilmartin in 1980, then by D. J. Enright ten years later—not only for their accuracy but also for their greater fluency—that now I may let go of the quaint old title, even as I was relieved of the translation's many difficulties.

I read the first volume, *Swann's Way*, in my teens. Charmed by the beauty of the prose, the fineness of the impressions, the narrator's childhood struggles with love and identity, and then swept up in the Parisian love story of the elegant Jewish socialite Charles Swann and the courtesan Odette, I went on to the second volume. *Within a Budding Grove*, with its raptures of adolescent love—hopeless crushes on Swann's wife, Odette, and her daughter, the blond Gilberte, then on the dark-haired darling Albertine—is a pleasing sequel, full of the poetry of the seaside Brittany resort Balbec and seascapes as only Proust could render them, either directly, or indirectly as he describes the paintings of his Whistler-like character Elstir. All of these things make a novel very appealing to a young reader in love with love and poetry and France.

So it was not until I came to the middle of the seemingly interminable third volume, *The Guermantes Way*, that I suffered the doldrums and jumped ship. Proust and I parted company for a few years. That book largely concerns Marcel's crush on the preposterously aristocratic Duchesse de Guermantes, and our young hero's ascent into the lofty society of the Faubourg St. Germain; one of its major themes is snobbery. Marcel is not so much in love with this social paragon as he wants to *be* the Duchesse

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de Guermantes. Marcel longs to be accepted into the world of snobs, and he is an insufferable snob himself. Nothing could have been of less interest to me at the age of seventeen, in the mid-sixties, and so I stopped reading the novel.

I did not return to Proust until college when I began to study French in earnest. Then I was urged to read Proust as the master of a rare prose style that combined certain virtues of French, English, and German: French clarity, English richness, and German command of abstraction. So I read *Combray* (the first half of *Swann's Way*) in the original language, and my effort was richly rewarded. Professor Shattuck in *Proust's Way* says that anyone who can comfortably read "Camus in the original should tackle the *Search* in French. The translation will not turn out to be much easier." I disagree with the beginning of his sentence, but I heartily endorse its conclusion, "and one should at least make the attempt."

What we learn from reading the French is that the translation is trustworthy; Moncrieff, Kilmartin, and Enright deliver most of Proust's imagery and thought, and much of his tone. What the English lacks—beyond the inimitable music of the French—is a certain limpidity, and also, paradoxically, an architectural firmness and precision. Sentence by French sentence it is as if one were viewing, from the portal, an exquisite Gothic chapel made entirely of crystal, so that both the façades and interior structures may be seen at a glance.

And these enchanting sentences, with their lively variety of length, their perfectly balanced vectors of adventure, their suspensions and surprises always satisfyingly resolved, are congruent with the structure of the whole novel. They promise that no matter how arbitrarily the story seems to be moving that there will be, in good time, a payoff, that it will all, eventually, come out right in the end. Ezra Pound, who was one of Proust's very first advocates, once said that technique was the true test of a writer's sincerity. That we are in the hands of a master is unmistakable in Proust's French, if the English leaves any room for doubt.

> Parfois à l'exaltation que me donnait la solitude, s'en ajoutait une autre que je ne savais pas en départager nettement, causée par le désir de voir surgir devant moi une paysanne que je pourrais serrer dans mes bras.

Translating these forty French words calls for sixty words of good English, sacrificing Proust's gem-like concentration in order to unpack the meaning.

My study of his French sentences at last convinced me that someday I would, I must return to Proust, and read as much of the *Search* as time would allow. In English.

Edmund White's little book, published last year, reminded me of my vow to finish the *Search*, and White's modest discussion of Proust's sexuality provided me with a useful key to the novel and the courage to begin again. Reading a book as long as Proust's requires charity of all kinds, including suspension of disbelief: some characters and situations in this novel are not true to life, and it is helpful to know they were not simply drawn from life. Some of these men and women are disguised, "in drag," to use White's phrase. Proust preferred not to be widely known as a homosexual; more importantly, he did not want his book to be narrowly read as a story about homosexual love.

When I first read Proust in 1965 I had little understanding of homosexuality in general, and absolutely no understanding of Proust's temperament in particular. All I knew about the author was that he was asthmatic and frail most of his life, and that illness limited his worldly experience while he nursed his sensitivities and refined his intelligence. Edmund White explains the extent to which Marcel, Proust's narrator-hero, differs from his creator, while implying (if I do not mistake him) that illness is a metaphor for several kinds of otherness, of remoteness from family, friends, and society. White shows how the hero's heterosexual adventures encode Proust's homosexual

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love affairs. Perhaps none of these ideas is indispensable (there are appreciative readings by Edmund Wilson, in *Axel's Castle*, and Howard Nemerov, in *The Oak in the Acorn*, that disregard Proust's real life), but Mr. White is a sympathetic guide through some passages of the novel, particularly Marcel's woman troubles, situations which I find puzzling, unreal, and unsavory.

With Mr. White's book at my side I launched into the novel once more, page one of my 1923 edition of *Swann's Way*, "For a long time I used to go to bed early," and then sailed right through it. No wonder—this being my third time, I recalled much of the story. Proust gets us into bed with him, and from that cozy beginning he engenders a unique intimacy. I was so exhilarated I ran out and treated myself to the state-of-the-art Modern Library Edition (1998) of *Within a Budding Grove* as revised by Kilmartin and Enright. And that flew by just as swiftly. By then I felt confident, even though I was nearing the Scylla and Charybdis of *The Guermantes Way*, where so many brave readers have been drowned. I figured I didn't need any of these newfangled translations. I would run with my old 1925 double-volumed Moncrieff of the *Guermantes*. But eighty-or-so pages out to sea, I was becalmed. It was just about the same spot I had come to grief in 1965, lovesick Marcel's obsessions over the Duchesse de Guermantes. Marcel's passion seemed not only pointless but also boring and silly, and so did the sentences. It was either me or the book. I decided it must be the book (recalling Proust's impeccable French) and went to the bookstore to fetch the new translation of *The Guermantes Way*.

I could not put it down, or any of the rest. I had begun *Swann's Way* on February 9, and I read the last page of *Time Regained*, on May 15. I did not cheat or skim; with the exception of a notoriously pedantic three pages on place-names, I did not skip a page, nor did I give up a sentence until I felt I had understood it.

> Once before, indeed, in the church at Combray, she had appeared to me in the blinding flash of a transfiguration; with cheeks irreducible to, impervious to the colour of the name Guermantes and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, taking the place of my shattered dream, like a swan or a willow into which a god or nymph has been changed, and which henceforward, subjected to natural laws, will glide over the water or be shaken by the wind.

The revised translation, published in six handy and attractive volumes (*The Captive* and *The Fugitive* are bound together), is so far superior to the old Moncrieff that, with the best intentions, I would not have finished the novel without it.

While the structure of the book is complex, with hundreds of characters growing and mingling over more than fifty years, the plot, as in many great works of literature, is almost primitively simple. It is a *Bildungsroman*, or "novel of education." More strictly speaking it is a *Kunstlerroman* like Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, in which the young hero finally becomes a novelist. Young Marcel wants to become a writer, but the world (his friends and lovers) and his own physical and mental infirmities are standing in the way. By far the most fascinating and vigorous obstacle is Marcel's need to love and be loved. Love is the major theme; love which in Proust's universe arises only in pursuit of the unattainable, and can survive only in an atmosphere charged with jealousy. It is romantic, tempestuous, Latin. For many of us, the kind of "love" that shakes and rattles these French characters has not been endured since junior high when one had a crush on a teacher, or "went steady" with another fickle adolescent to see who could break whose heart first. Proust devotes hundreds of pages to the workings of jealousy, and, if you have as little fascination with that passion as I do, those pages are slow going. We are a long way from *Tristan und Isolde* or even *Anna Karenina*. Proustian love is love in a minor key, paradoxical, intellectual, doomed, damned, and destructive. Marcel will be

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much better off without it, but not before he has suffered, and learned love's hard lessons, as a bittersweet inoculation.

At the heart of this "novel of education" is Marcel's passion for the beautiful Albertine. Their love story spans volumes II–VI of *A la recherche* like the nave of Notre Dame. Tadié explains that the book was constructed from the outside in—the first and last volumes were first written, then the middle of the novel was gradually expanded to fit the story of Albertine and Marcel.

On the rebound from his childhood romance with Swann's blond-haired daughter, the wealthy, sophisticated Gilberte, Marcel journeys in his grandmother's care to the seaside town of Balbec, on the Normandy coast. There, captivated by a "little band" of girls his age who play together on the beach, he soon makes their acquaintance. Curiously, delicate Marcel becomes one of them, the little band of girls, all the while falling in love with them abstractly and studying them as a type of human perfection and youthful beauty, as if they were blossoms on an apple tree in spring. This is one of Proust's more poetic illustrations of his Platonism, in which the whole novel is drenched. He falls in love with Albertine's type, as figured forth in the group of nymphs, before he focuses on the specific girl herself.

Albertine Simonet, a poor relation raised by her wealthy aunt, Mme. Bontemps, is beautiful of cheek and nape and limb, sturdy, voluptuous, with a head of shiny black curls that is like nothing outside of a Baudelaire poem. Marcel falls in love with her, and so did I. She is cheerful, wise, kind, truthful, and agreeable to a fault, especially in Marcel's eyes (once she has fallen in love with him) since he can find no other fault with her. Albertine is a dreamgirl, a wonder, one of Proust's greatest characters (though less distinct than the famous Baron de Charlus). Without the sweetness of Albertine to balance Marcel's acerbity the story would be unbearable. It is almost unbearable anyway to witness Marcel's progress from a starry-eyed wooer (before she loves him) to a sadistic slave-master (after she has fallen for him) so obsessed with fantasies of her betraying him, with men and women, that he makes her an abject captive in his parents' house. "She was so effectively caged that on certain evenings I did not even ask her to leave her room for mine, she whom at one time all the world pursued." Proust makes us love Albertine more than Marcel does, so we find ourselves on the sidelines screaming at our benighted hero: "How can you be such a jackass? How can you treat her so shabbily, lie to her, tease and torment her, abusing her in every way short of the rod. . . . Can't you see she really loves you?" The simple answer of course is no. Marcel can't see that she loves him, because his fatal flaw is that he cannot understand or enjoy love, neither the giving nor the receiving of it, in the sensible world. The spirit world is more congenial. He loves his sainted grandmother, but never so dearly as after she is dead and buried.

To return to Graham Greene's analogy between Tolstoy and Proust, the most striking contrast between these great novelists is evident in Tolstoy's superior knowledge of the world—Proust seems a precocious, loquacious, needy child beside him. And unlike the discreet Henry James, Proust is willing to risk making a fool of himself in the service of his art, in pontificating about so many things he only narrowly understands, or things of which he is wholly ignorant, such as heterosexual love. His comic genius is in turning this to his advantage. Proust is the boldest of writers. He will leap from the particular case to the general, from his own narrow experience of love he will deduce the experiences of lesbian and heterosexual love, etc.; he constantly employs the first-person plural in his editorials, enlisting us in opinions we cannot possibly share.

So we get, haphazardly, pages of astonishing perception and then passages of appalling stupidity. "Every person we love is to us like Janus, presenting to us a face that

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pleases us if the person leaves us, a dreary face if we know him or her to be at our perpetual disposal." I wish I could say that epigram was served up in a spirit of irony, but it wasn't. "Do we not find every day that adultery, when it is based upon genuine love, does not weaken family feelings and the duties of kinship, but rather revivifies them?" No, Marcel, we don't. And your bourgeois neighbors didn't either—not every day or at all.

What nearly put me off the novel was my suspicion that Proust and his foolish narrator were one and the same, that Marcel's desperate beliefs—that love is not possible between flesh-and-blood people, and that even the dearest friendship, such as Marcel's lifelong bond with Robert St. Loup, is only a meretricious distraction from the true purpose of life, which is solitary contemplation of the self—were the author's opinions. It is one thing to be entertained by a fictional monster, but quite another thing to spend two-hundred hours with a real one, separated only scantly by the writer's death in 1922 that left him at large in those potent sentences.

Not until volume VI, *The Fugitive* ("Albertine disparue"), after Marcel has lost his treasure, did I realize that Proust was fully aware of his protagonist's folly. Marcel is paying dearly for the abuse of his mistress. Grieving the loss of Albertine, he groans: "So what I believed to be nothing to me was simply my entire life. How ignorant one is of oneself." Indeed, and at that moment Proust's superior understanding overtakes us in waves, bringing back with it the whole dark comedy. We may never be sure exactly what Proust thought about love and human relationships, but certainly he knew far more than his hero, in order to have made such sport of him.

My struggle with Marcel's narcissism, his snobbery, his monomaniacal jealousy, would, I think, have pleased the author. How is a reader to learn anything from such a "novel of education" if one does not grow as exasperated with the hero as he does with himself on the verge of enlightenment? And perhaps the author would be all the more satisfied with my resistance to Marcel, knowing that I was an American. Time and again Proust gently makes fun of Anglo-American morality, especially the foursquare English sense of "fair play." Even as he praises the British for rushing to the aid of France during the Great War for reasons totally idealistic and altruistic, he thinks it a naïve and silly, though charming, act. As an American, I am probably more judgmental than a European reading Proust, more moralistic and defensive, less content to stand by and watch these strange Frenchmen doing their mean things to one another, while taking voyeuristic pleasure in it.

But let me tell you how this book can work on you, how it can make the strange thing seem suddenly familiar. It is in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, a while after Albertine has given herself to him body and soul, that Marcel begins to distance himself from her in cruel ways, such as pretending he has fallen in love with her best friend. He enjoys the sadness he sees in her eyes, his power over her. "I was merely . . . making more perceptible, accentuating more markedly, that binary rhythm which love adopts in all those who have too little confidence in themselves to believe that a woman can ever fall in love with them, and also that they themselves can genuinely fall in love with her." For several pages I had been outraged, furious with Marcel, when suddenly I lifted my head from the book, seized by a revery. At the age of twenty-one, I had been in love with a dark-haired girl not unlike Albertine, and I had done something just as unkind to push her away. Ashamed of it, I had banished the memory, buried it as too ignoble to be part of *my* past, and I had not thought of the incident in almost thirty years. I had forgotten about my youthful cruelty; Marcel Proust had *remembered*. In that moment of reading, reading Proust and reading myself, my sense of moral superiority crumbled to dust, and thereafter I remained on a human level with Marcel, however much I might dislike him.

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The plot, of course, is no more than that, a primitive chassis upon which Proust mounted a most marvelous and complex vehicle. One by one Marcel overcomes the obstacles that keep him from his vocation as a writer: his vanity and desire for prestige, his social ambitions, and the desire for love, erotic love as well as friendship. The story of Marcel and Albertine is the centerpiece to a triptych of love stories; to its right is the bourgeois melodrama of Charles Swann and Odette, to the left is the broad comedy of the homosexual Baron de Charlus's passion for the opportunistic bisexual violinist Charles Morel. The side panels lend perspective to the irony and pathos of Marcel's story in the middle.

Proust artfully balances these narratives, laying one aside when it runs out of steam, picking it up again when another story is exhausted. Just when you think you cannot bear another page of Marcel's harangues on love and jealousy, or time and memory, the delightfully wicked Baron de Charlus comes waddling onstage, sounding like Ernie Kovacs's outrageous monocled poet Percy Dovetonsils, and the novel springs back to life.

In Proust's fiction we enjoy a pleasing counterpoint of romance and irony, humor and pathos, a balance of which Proust boasts, indirectly, in praising the sincerity of the baron: "How unfortunate it is that M. de Charlus is not a novelist or poet. . . . He cannot get stuck in an ironical and superficial view of things because a current of pain is perpetually reawakened within him." If Charlus *could* be a novelist, he would be like Proust, who was never pickled by irony, but who prized it as a necessary antidote to the sentimentality that frequently swamped the baron.

If I were going to recommend a single book as companion to *A la recherche* it would be Roger Shattuck's *Field Guide*, which in 250 pages manages to provide all that is necessary to understand the novel, in case there is anything that Proust himself has left insufficiently explained. Most worthy Proust scholars begin with the caveat that there is little they can say about the novel by way of interpretation or explanation that the author has not included gratis along with the story. This is true. But Professor Shattuck has drawn up Proust's résumé, and a twenty-page essay on "The Work and Its Author," which may help a new reader to avoid some of the muddles I experienced. And his twenty-five page essay "How to Read a Roman-Fleuve" is the guide proper to *this* particular roman-fleuve. It includes not only a concise plot summary, but also a description of places and major characters, as well as diagrams and discussions of the main love affairs in the book and the society scenes, which consume so many pages. An essay on "The Comic Vision" reminds us that some of Proust's humor may be lost in translation, and "Proust's Complaint" analyzes the paradox of desire that torments Marcel throughout the novel. Marcel only wants what he does not have, what he has he does not want. "It is this clouding of the mind at the moment of achieving what it most desires, this 'infirmity in my nature,' that I call Proust's complaint," writes Mr. Shattuck.

Mr. Shattuck never locates Marcel's dilemma in the history of French philosophy, where it certainly has earned a place. Of Proust's philosophical and aesthetic themes, I think that the most interesting also happens to be the central question in French thought from the seventeenth century until the middle of the twentieth. This is the Cartesian problem of existence and solipsism. Marcel does not debate the ontological questions or dilate upon them as he does upon the mysteries of time and memory, but his very life is an essay in solipsism. "Question as I might, it was myself who answered, I learned nothing more." Much of Proust's life was lived in a bubble; because of his illness he was ill equipped to deal with the world, and his wealth enabled him to live in isolation. So his book engages the Cartesian problem at a very personal level, turning it into drama. Insofar as *A la recherche* may be said to achieve tragic stat-

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ure, it is because of Marcel's poignant failure to overcome his loneliness—though in the end he manages to arrange a heroic peace with it. In art, which transcends temporal reality, he eventually will find consolation for the love he has sought in vain in the temporal world. For the reader who is not blessed, as Proust was, with the gift to achieve immortality through art, it may seem a cold comfort.

Fans of Jean-Paul Sartre may recall that the hero of his philosophical novel *La Nausée* (1938), Antoine Roquentin, reaches the same conclusions as Marcel, and a similar peace, after a long meditation on the absurdities of essence and existence. Sartre's exquisite novel is so deeply indebted to Proust that we can read it as a two-hundred page variation on the Proustian themes, reshaped to anticipate the despair of Camus and Beckett that will be called existentialism after the Second World War.

Proust has never received his due as a proto-existentialist, as Kafka and Dostoyevsky have, probably because of his enduring reputation as a romantic symbolist. It was Edmund Wilson in the 1920s who called Proust "the first important novelist to apply the principles of Symbolism to fiction." Wilson observed that Proust had been young in the Eighties and Nineties, when symbolism was in the air. Proust's romantic sensibility naturally thrived upon the technique of using concrete figures—the madeleine, the bumble-bee and orchid, the seawaves—to stand for abstract realities such as the persistence of memory, generation and regeneration, and the soul's journey. And Plato and Kant pointed the way to the "higher worlds."

Proust is an odd hero in twentieth-century literature, an anachronism, being at once a romantic, a Platonist, and an impressionist, an artificer of a baroque, old-fashioned roman-fleuve that is in so many ways the antithesis of streamlined modern art. So much of modern painting and literature is a reaction (however respectful) against impressionism; Proust's prose is impressionism's crowning achievement. So much of the Anglo-American language of modernism is a demonstration against rhetoric and ornamentation; Proust's sentences are the most complex and elaborate in French literature. One has to look to the nineteenth-century English and German to find anything like them.

Then there is the strange influence of Platonism, Plato direct, and Plato via Kant. Plato hovers over Proust's pages, as daemon, as tutelary spirit, just as Aristotle and Aquinas accompanied James Joyce on his journey. It was Joyce whose ideas and sensibility prevailed during the period we now call High Modernism: Eliot and Pound, Beckett and Stein, Hemingway and Moore quickly shook off the traces of romanticism, and banished the abstractions and mysteries associated with Platonism in favor of the concrete, measurable world and spare, strict language. Clinging to an endangered tradition, Proust, among novelists, and W. B. Yeats, among poets, rode into the twentieth century high on the horse of romanticism before riding out on a horse of a duskier color. Yeats began as a dreamy Pre-Raphaelite, an aesthete in love with Ireland's romantic, heroic past. He ended as an ironist, furious with Ireland's folly and man's treachery to man, but, like Proust, convinced of the heuristic, transfiguring value of literature.

> Poet and sculptor, do the work
> Nor let the modist painter shirk
> What his great forefathers did,
> Bring the soul of man to God,
> Make him fill the cradles right.

Proust started out, in *Swann's Way*, as an aesthete, a sighing romantic, and survived, in *Time Regained*, as a creditable comedian and historian of capitalist culture. After many years and thousands of pages of disappointment and disillusionment, he ended up a cynic in the ancient sense, and the father of French existentialists, with a belief in no redemption or transcendence but in the glory of art.

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The Marianne Mynah: a memoir of Marianne Moore

by William Jay Smith

On October 3, 1947, Marianne Moore wrote to her brother about a dinner party she had attended the night before, given by Margaret Mitchell, the literary editor of *The Nation*:

> I was overwhelmed—crabmeat in alligator pears, each a half broiled chicken, delicate peas, salad, & real pears & cheese. I was put by Stephen Spender who is quite a treat; he knew Yeats, knows Mr. Auden & T. S. Eliot well, and then afterward Louise Bogan came in & others. She has reviewed me *twice* you know very boldly & ardently. . . . Then I came home quite late—11:15 & found a telegram from Barbara Howes & William Smith—he's a poet & Rhodes Scholar—they are being married today, before he goes to Oxford—& invite me to a small party at 8:30 & I b'lieve I'll go.

She did indeed go to that wedding party, where she was, as she often was at such gatherings, the center of attention. I had never set eyes on her before, but my debt to her was inestimable, for she had literally launched my poetic career. Like W. H. Auden, who admitted having stolen more from her than he cared to acknowledge, I benefitted not only from her poetry, which had been a constant companion, but also from her generosity and from what Louise Bogan, whom she admired above all her contemporaries, called in a *New Yorker* review her connoisseurship. I like to think that it was this connoisseurship that led her to comment favorably on a poem of mine. Her approval would, of course, have been welcome at any time but it was all the more welcome because it came completely unsolicited when it was most needed.

In the spring of 1947 when I was a graduate student at Columbia University, Claude Fredericks and Milton Saul, who had just started the Banyan Press and had seen some of my poems in magazines, came to me and asked if I had a book ready for publication. I didn't, but unable to resist such an invitation, I gathered together twenty-one of what I considered my best poems, and the book, titled simply *Poems* (this was a time when simplicity, especially for the beginner, was still appreciated), was ready in a very handsome printing all done by hand the following summer. One of the poems, "Cupidon," had appeared a month or two before in the little magazine *Furioso*, edited by my friends Howard Nemerov, Reed Whittemore, and John Pauker. The editors sent a copy of this issue of the magazine to Marianne Moore, and she wrote back promptly, as was her habit, with sharp and pointed, but always positive, comments on the contents. She singled out my poem for particular praise.

My title, "Cupidon," means, of course, "cupid," but I was thinking in this case of one of those eighteenth-century gilt figures of cupid, and, with that century's irony perhaps, of that further meaning "fop," a man excessively concerned with manners and appearance:

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"To love is to give," said the crooked old man.
"To love is to be poor."
And he led me up his accordion stair,
And closed his iron door.

"To love is to give." His words like wire
Dragged the ocean floor.
"Throw ten of your blankets on the fire,
Then throw ten thousand more."

His room was the prayer on the head of a pin.
As clean as a diamond cut
Was the iron door which opened in
And would not open out.

"To love is to give, to give, to give.
Give more and more and more."
And the wind crept up his accordion stair,
And under his iron door.

Marianne Moore said of this poem, "William Jay Smith's 'Cupidon' is a permanence, a rare felicity." I cannot describe the excitement with which I read this on the postcard that arrived from *Furioso* in that part of New York, then called "Hell's Kitchen," where I occupied a tiny apartment. My book had already been printed and no dustjacket had been planned, but Claude and Milton printed Miss Moore's statement on a handsome paper band, that, with her permission, encircled every book that went out and which insured its careful attention from reviewers in *The New York Times*, the *Saturday Review*, and elsewhere and which made the entire book an immediate candidate for the permanence that she had claimed for my poem.

"Cupidon" was for me a mysterious poem, all the more so because, unlike other poems in this first book that I had labored over for years, it poured forth at one sitting almost exactly as it now stands: clearly something had been triggered in my subconscious mind but what and why and how remained a mystery. And clearly it was a treatment of a theme deeply rooted in folklore: "'Will you step into my parlor?,' said the Spider to the Fly," as it had been previously expressed. But it was equally mysterious to me why a little work with so sinister a theme had such appeal to Marianne Moore. I now think that I understand the reason: the poem was for her a kind of admonitory fable that embodied in a sense the moral basis of all that she stood for as an artist. She was an inspired magpie as a poet, collecting and threading together bits and pieces of the rich fabric of speech past and present: the treasures she collected like the picture of an Egyptian desert rat or an albino giraffe on a Kiwi shoe-polish can could not be stored away for herself alone but had to be offered up to her reader and to the world. For her, as she so frequently admonishes herself in her poems, the door that opens *in* must always open out.

Marianne Moore was so taken with "Cupidon" that she wanted to share it with her friends. She had committed it to memory, she later told me, and enjoyed reciting it on the telephone, a fact that Elizabeth Bishop confirmed. She also sent it to T. S. Eliot, who wrote back that although the poem was "quite nice," he could not understand "what all those blankets were doing there." I had in mind the potlatch ceremony of the Northwest Indians in which the tribal leaders, to demonstrate their power, heap blankets, their most prized possessions, on to the fire, each trying to outdo the other. The irony in the poem is that the blankets may extinguish the fire. I thought that the statement, double-edged though it was, was perfectly clear in the context and was astonished that Mr. Eliot would object to exactly the kind of reference that he made consistently in his own work.

At our wedding party, Marianne Moore told us how delighted she was to answer our summons and how pleased to accept a glass of champagne, the first since one she and her mother had had with Sir Edmund Gosse. She said that she had spent the day trying to find a suitable present for us but had been unable to find anything that would not be a burden. A perfect gift, we said, would be an inscription in her *Collected Poems*. My copy came back a few days later, her inscription accompanied by endless corrections in her spidery hand.

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Marianne Moore sat down beside my mother to whom she took an immediate liking. They had little in common except for their red hair that they each wore in braids around their heads, but while Marianne Moore's hair was a light red with a dust of gray throughout, my mother's was a dark glistening auburn with no trace of gray. Elizabeth Bishop has given us a description of Marianne Moore at this time:

> Marianne's hair was always done up in a braid around the crown of her head, a style dating from around 1900, I think, and never changed. Her skin was fair, translucent, although faded when I knew her. Her face paled and flushed so quickly she reminded me of Rima in W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*. Her eyes were bright, not "bright" as we often say about eyes when we really mean alert; they were that too, but also shiny bright and, like those of a small animal, often looked at one sidewise—quickly, at the conclusion of a sentence that had turned out unusually well, just to see if it had taken effect. Her face was small and pointed but not really triangular because it was a little lopsided, with a delicately pugnacious-looking jaw. When one day I told her she looked like Mickey Rooney, then a very young actor (and she did) she seemed quite pleased.

Although Marianne Moore continued to be supportive of my work over the years, there were occasions when what I wrote displeased her greatly. One of my early favorites among her poems was "Silence":

> My father used to say,
> "Superior people never make long visits,
> have to be shown Longfellow's grave
> or the glass flowers at Harvard.
> Self-reliant like the cat—
> that takes its prey to privacy,
> the mouse's limp tail hanging like a shoelace
> from its mouth—
> they sometimes enjoy solitude,
> and can be robbed of speech
> by speech which has delighted them.
> The deepest feeling always shows itself in
> silence;
> not in silence, but restraint."
> Nor was he insincere in saying, "Make my
> house your inn."
> Inns are not residences.

When I wrote "Plain Talk," which takes off from the opening lines of "Silence," I may have thought that Marianne Moore would have no objection to my having lifted some words from her because she had lifted the opening words from someone else. The fact that her poem was my point of departure, I may also have thought, would surely be clear to the reader with any background in modern poetry, and if my poem was a parody, it would be clear, especially to Marianne Moore with her sense of humor, that one parodies only what one loves. I should have realized that she was prepared for anything but the four-letter words that I used.

"Of course, Mrs. Moore and her daughter were what some people might call 'prudish,'" Elizabeth Bishop pointed out; "it would be kinder to say 'overfastidious.'" This applied to Mrs. Moore more than to Marianne; Marianne, increasingly with age, was capable of calling a spade a spade, or at least calling it by its archaic name. I remember her worrying about the fate of a mutual friend whose sexual tastes had always seemed quite obvious to me: "What are we going to do about X. . . . Why, sometimes I think he may even be in the clutches of a *sodomite*." One could almost smell the brimstone. But several novels of the Thirties and Forties, including Mary McCarthy's *The Company She Keeps*, were taken down to the cellar and burned in the furnace. I published a very bad short story a year or two after I first knew the Moores and I was reprimanded by both of them for having used the word "spit." (Two or three years later I was scolded for having used "water closet" in my poem "Roosters," but by then I had turned obstinate.) Marianne once gave me her practical rules for the use of indecent language. She said,

> Ordinarily, I would never use the word *rump*. But I can perfectly well say to Mother,

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"Mother, there's a thread on your *rump*," because *she* knows that I'm referring to Cowper's pet hare, "Old Tiney," who liked to play on the carpet and "swing his *rump* around."

Marianne Moore was fond of military men—her brother was a Navy chaplain—but it was the words of generals, not enlisted men, that she often quoted. She could not accept the forthright language that I attributed to my professional soldier father, a corporal in the regular army, in "Plain Talk." It was not until after her death that I discovered that she had written more than once to the anthologist William Cole, asking him to remove the material on such and such a page (which turned out to be my poem) from an anthology he had edited. Here is what she would have censored:

"There are people so dumb," my father said,
"That they don't know beans from an old
bedstead.
They can't tell one thing from another,
Ella Cinders from Whistler's Mother,
A porcupine quill from a peacock feather,
A buffalo-flop from Florentine leather.
Meatless shanks boiled bare and blue,
They bob up and down like bones in a stew;
Don't know their arse from a sassafras root,
And couldn't pour piss from a cowhide boot
With complete directions on the heel."

That's how *he* felt—that's how *I* feel.

At the height of her fame there was never anything derogatory said about Marianne Moore: she was in the eye of critics and reviewers an untouchable poet of great stature. She was the first to admit that she was odd, but she was absolutely honest, and if she had any flaws or blemishes they were passed over in silence. She wrote:

Blessed is the man
who does not sit in the seat of the scoffer—
the man who does not denigrate, depreciate,
denunciate; . . .

Denigration she considered treason. As a critic she could always find something to praise. Even in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, which she would not exactly be expected to relish, she discovered something positive:

Allen Ginsberg, quoting himself, has been "shopping for images in the poetic supermarket" and can foul the nest in a way to marvel at, but it is an innocent enough picture of himself which he provides when he "sat down under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive." That he "found minds unable to receive love because not knowing the self as lovely" is a thoughtful statement.

"She seldom expressed opinions of other writers," Elizabeth Bishop tells us, "and the few I remember were, to say the least, ambiguous or ambivalent. She developed the strategy of damning with faint praise to an almost supersonic degree. One writer whom I rather dislike and suspect she did, too, was praised several times for her 'beautifully laundered shirtwaist.' One day when I was meeting her in New York, she said she had just run into Djuna Barnes, after many years, on the steps of the Public Library. I was curious and asked her what Djuna Barnes was 'like.' There was rather a long pause before Marianne said thoughtfully, 'Well . . . she looked very smart, and her shoes were *beautifully* polished.'"

When sent a book of poems by Hugh Chisholm and asked to comment on it, she wrote back, praising the magnificent McKnight Kauffer dustjacket. I stood beside her once at the American Academy of Arts and Letters when together we entered a room in which were displayed on every wall huge, very green, and truly abominable landscapes. She paused for a moment and then turning to me, her bright eyes twinkling, said, "He certainly loves the country, doesn't he?"

Marianne Moore was very good material for the press; interviewers had a field day with her. Even from her fellow poets there was never anything bad or disrespectful in print, although poets can be bitchier about one another than any other human beings.

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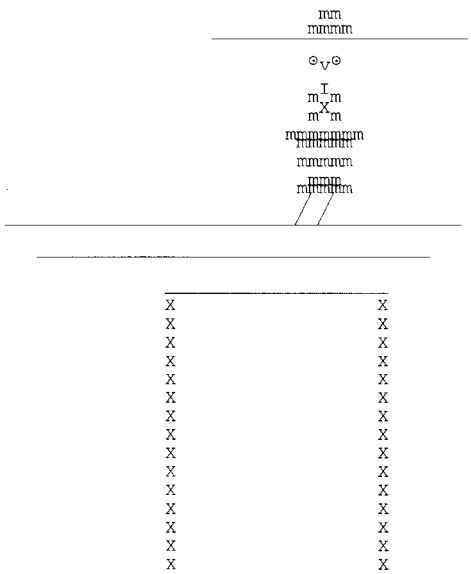
Some of the colleagues whom she most admired did make a few off-the-record comments. Louse Bogan, who always wrote in glowing but perceptive terms of her poetry, said to me once, that admirable as she was, Marianne Moore was clearly becoming more and more peculiar. Another admirer, Allen Tate, said, "If any woman is going to be that strange, she just ought to stay inside and draw the blinds." And that is exactly what Marianne Moore was prepared to do: she had likened herself in her Brooklyn abode to "a cat in a basket with the lid on," "a badger under a hedge of poison ivy," or "a rat in a cheese," and that is the way she preferred it to be. I also had my private reservations, reflected in this unpublished "Two-Syllable Sonnet":

I do
agree
with The-
odore
Roethke
when he
says of
Mari-
anne Moore
that she
did not
invent
integ-
rity.

But on the whole these were slight indeed. Marianne Moore had the courage of her idiosyncrasies. One of her essays is called "Idiosyncrasy and Technique." She was happy to acknowledge being a splendid eccentric, the American equivalent of Dame Edith Sitwell, whom she admired. Glenway Wescott, at the conclusion of an essay on her work, writes:

> It occurs to me that I have not uttered a single adverse criticism. Here is one: It may be said that her poetry perhaps unduly lends itself to fragmentation. But who cares, when the components are strong incantations, secular prayers, sanity-saving aphorisms, new melodies of the language, puzzles that one may happily spend one's life solving, or at least pondering. Ravishment worth thinking about; upon the poor vast deserts a silvery little dwelling place for the ratlike mind of man.

There was for me one more serious reservation. In 1957, the anthology *New World Writing* included a series of my "Literary Birds." These were verses about leading literary figures—Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dame Edith Sitwell, among them—depicted as birds, and the verses were accompanied by drawings done on the typewriter. "The Marianne Mynah" showed a small bird in a broad hat perched over a door:



The Marianne Mynah,
Perched over the door,
Quotes Jean de la Fontaine
And Marianne Moore.

Quotes Marianne Moore
And Jean de la Fontaine
Over and over
And over again.

In New York on a visit from Brazil when the verse appeared, Elizabeth Bishop was delighted with "Literary Birds," as was

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Robert Lowell, but it is doubtful that Marianne Moore herself approved of the "Marianne Mynah," as innocent-sounding as the verses at first appeared. It was not until after their publication that I realized myself the full implications of what I had written and drawn. I became certain that she would never forgive me for having identified her with the mynah bird. On the green lawns of Waikiki during World War II, I had observed the sleek black mynah hopping about, not unlike Marianne Moore herself springing elegantly in her conversation from one topic to the other. But the mynah has one other feature that I was sure would not have escaped Marianne Moore: it has a most unpleasant, raucous voice. I realized at once that I was reflecting years later on the one—and only one—disappointment that I had had on first meeting her. I was immediately enchanted by every aspect of her personality—her looks, her clothes, her manners, her conversation—all were exactly as I had expected them to be. She possessed for me, as she had for W. H. Auden, all the Alice qualities. The only aspect of her person that I was not prepared for was her voice, which had a very disagreeable and even grating nasal twang to it. I had expected that a poet capable of such exquisite rhythms—many of them deeply rooted in Irish tradition—could not fail to have a musical lilt to her voice. But she had none. Her nasal twang had not escaped the attention of others. I had heard Mary Britton Miller, who under the name Isabel Bolton became famous with the publication of her novel *Do I Wake or Sleep?*, give several times at New York literary gatherings a cruel impersonation of Marianne Moore: "Ezra me made,/ Canonized me Tommaso./ Victrola me played,/ Reciting immortal poems/ Through *il mio naso*."

I was particularly ill prepared for Marianne Moore's voice because shortly before meeting her I had met that other great woman poet of her generation, Louise Bogan, who had an unusually fine contralto voice and who could recite her poems magnificently, giving full value to every vowel and consonant. For her, as for all true lyric poets, the human voice was a resonant instrument. Marianne Moore's poems, on the contrary, are the record of an inner voice, of a mind that "has memory's ear/ that can hear without/ having to hear." I came to realize that Marianne Moore's poems had been written for that exquisite inner ear that had no external equivalent and for this reason they were not really intended to be read aloud. They are difficult to learn by heart and difficult to recite. Only in poems such as "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing," in which she is speaking of music, do they rise to what one would ordinarily think of as verbal music.

I discovered much later that I was not the only poet to associate Marianne Moore with the mynah bird. When Elizabeth Bishop returned from Brazil to set up an apartment in San Francisco, one of her first acquisitions was a mynah bird. When the mynah learned to talk, his first phrase was: "My name is Jacob." The second was Marianne Moore's "I too dislike it." He later moved on to "I love you" and to Elizabeth Bishop's favorite line from her own work, "Awful but cheerful," words that are inscribed on her stone in the "Poets' Corner" in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. The words perhaps epitomize the mynah bird itself, so cheerful in its sleek elegant black plumage but awful in its raucous shrieks that only the most exquisite inner ear could convert to dulcet poetic tones.

Marianne Moore's lack of lyric resonance may account for the fragmentation that Glenway Wescott has mentioned and it may be her most serious limitation. But all poets are limited; not everyone is Shakespeare. All perfection has a flaw; of roses Marianne Moore wrote, "your thorns are the best part of you." She said that once, at Monroe Wheeler's, she and her friends played a game called "Who would you rather be except Shakespeare?" "I wouldn't mind," she is supposed to have said, "being La Fontaine or Voltaire." Although she had something akin to both, she was not worldly enough

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to have been either one. But she *was* Marianne Moore, someone very special indeed, a rarity in any age. Randall Jarrell said of her,

> There is so much of a life concentrated into, objectified on, these hard, tender, serious pages, there is such wit and truth and moral imagination inhabiting this small space, that we are surprised at possibility, and marvel all over again at the conditions of human making and being. What Miss Moore's best poetry does, I can say best in her words: it "comes into and steadies the soul," so that the reader feels himself "a life prisoner, but reconciled."

How her poetry had come into and steadied my soul I attempted to convey in a poem I wrote for the *Festschrift* edited by Tambimuttu for Marianne Moore's seventy-seventh birthday. This poem, which clearly reflects my debt to her, concludes with my returning to her, to whom they more properly belong, the words that she gave to me at the beginning of my career, "permanence" and "rare felicity":

> An Observation
>
> *For Marianne Moore on her seventy-seventh birthday*
>
> Now every day here at the height of summer
> from the edge of the apple tree bent by
> the weight of its fruit so that the whole
> thing
>
> Is crisscrossed with strings of small green
> apples,
> looped every which way up and down and
> in and
> out—
>
> Through the midday haze against the
> mountains swathed
> now in a gray-blue gauze of heat—
>
> From the heart of the apple tree, its bark
> mottled and
> warped, its branches hooked and looking
> half-
> hollow—
>
> From the hunched and dwarfed apple tree,
> and then from
> deep within the gray-green of the swamp
> willow—
> as if on a scale up and down its trailing
> branches—
>
> Then high there on the bough of the fat
> bulging ash, its
> gold keys hanging dry and desperate like
> the fringe
> of old upholstery—
>
> Now every day when all the other birds and
> even the
> insects have ceased I hear his chip-chip
> sweet-sweet
> chew-chew, followed by what sounds like a
> high *wit*—
>
> *Wit*—which, as you know, somehow cuts
> through the heart
> of haze; and see him—a blue gem
>
> Resting within the gray cushions of heat—his
> blue turning
> in the half-hooded light from indigo to
> ultramarine
> to azure
>
> Drawing into his faceted feathered body the
> gold and olive
> green of the mountains, absorbing as in
> watercolor all
> the lost color of the heavens
>
> While below him dragonflies beside the
> elderberry bush dart
> their wild blue brooches over the wet velvet
> surface of
> the pond;
>
> See him as you would see him, this New
> England visitor from
> the coast of Cuba, this indigo bunting as
> more than a
> mere jewel—
>
> As a flame breathing at the core of
> consciousness, fed by
> conscience, a poem poised against the
> shifting dull
> gray seasons, asking, in its permanence
> and rare
> felicity, "What are years?"

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Successes just missed: the career of Hector Berlioz

by James F. Penrose

The last century was not a particularly happy one for the two greatest composers of the romantic era. There's Franz Liszt—you remember him, don't you? Magpie collector of pianistic glitter? Lothario of Europe? And there's Hector Berlioz. You know, the "one work" man? No technique? Freakish and grotesque? And, as a consequence of all of the foregoing, a thoroughly embittered critic? Musical history, like the other sorts, is written, at least in the short run, by the victors, and the victors were anything but kind. Berlioz died a broken man, thwarted and frustrated throughout his career by the indifference and spite of the French musical establishment. After his death, biographers and commentators continued to embroider the same old fabric. Sacheverell Sitwell, for example, treated Berlioz as some sort of brilliant but alien force, enslaved by his "strange schemings." Debussy thought Berlioz a "monster." Stravinsky found his reputation as an orchestrator suspect and Verdi found him lacking in the "calm and . . . balance that produce complete works of art." Perhaps it was just a matter of fate: wrong place, wrong time, with Liszt and Berlioz being simply meant to take the bullet for all of the perceived failures of romanticism. Or maybe not. Regardless of their reputation among nonmusicians, their influence on their contemporaries and musical heirs was so profound that Western music could not possibly have developed as it did without them.

Berlioz's music did achieve some lasting recognition in England, Germany, Austria, and Russia, but it was largely shunned in his native country. Unfortunately for Berlioz, it was France in general and Paris in particular that was the source of his afflatus, an irony he was the first to grasp. "What the devil could God have been thinking when he had me born *in this pleasant land of France*?," he wrote after his third unsuccessful attempt for the Prix de Rome.

Though he was never to enjoy the popular success of contemporaries like (in descending order) Meyerbeer, Auber, Adolphe Adam, and the unspeakable Antoine Clapisson (*Gibby la cornemuse*, *Les mystères d' Udolphe*), Berlioz still remained in the public eye. He exercised a formidable influence on the musical scene as a critic for the *Journal des débats*. An incomparable prose stylist, he had no need to resort to the brutal hammerings favored by critics like Scudo and Azevedo or to their equally repellent favoritism. At various points during his career, Berlioz collected and published selections from his columns, some of which (*Evenings in the Orchestra*, *A travers chants*) are even now available. But his best writing was saved for his own *Mémoires*, a work which has rarely been out of print. By turns enchantingly funny and deeply poignant, *Mémoires* reads more like a picaresque novel than the autobiography of an older, profoundly disappointed man. It has been the natural starting place for all of Berlioz's

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biographers and, at the same time, the standard against which those biographies are measured. The best translation of the *Mémoires* is by the British critic David Cairns. It is itself, with Mr. Cairns's introduction and five appendices, a proto-biography of the composer. In this respect, it is not much of a surprise that Mr. Cairns has worked this material, and much more, up into his own biography of Berlioz.[1]

Berlioz's immense musical significance exists at several levels. First, he practically invented modern orchestral technique. In his revision of Berlioz's *Treatise on Instrumentation*, Richard Strauss wrote that even Beethoven could never really shake the influence of Haydn's and Mozart's string quartets on his symphonic writing and that the influence of the piano is never far removed ("unfortunately, not always to the listener's enjoyment"—only Strauss could say something like that). Mr. Cairns notes that Berlioz, unlike most great composers, was not a pianist and was not bound to that instrument by habit and acclimation. It was really with Berlioz, as Strauss and Mr. Cairns point out, that the orchestra was first written for as an instrument in its own right, a development which culminated in *Tristan* and *The Ring*.

Second, Berlioz's understanding of the capacity of the orchestra led him to create hitherto unknown orchestral color and emotional effect. Few other composers have been able to imbue specific emotions in the listener or musically imitate physiological sensations with as much precision and effect. In this vein, Berlioz was able to create musical analogies to written text with astonishing ease, a happy development in that he wrote many of his programs himself.

Third, Berlioz was the role model for the modern musical critic. His mixture of technical expertise, insight, tact, and humor makes his criticism excellent reading even today. Certainly, the same cannot be said of Schumann or Hanslick whom we read for informational purposes, but hardly for the sheer enjoyment of their prose.

Fourth, by the 1830s, France was thoroughly in the grips of Italian and Meyerbeerian opera (Andrew Lloyd-Webber being the Meyerbeer of our day) with its emphasis on virtuosity and pageantry, elusive qualities that are so often misused or misinterpreted. Noteworthy or symphonic music was virtually nonexistent—it was difficult even for Beethoven's works to be performed. In general, the traditional ideals of French music—clarity, vivacity, elegance, economy, and deep feeling—were set aside in the pursuit of spectacular effect. Berlioz's music was the antithesis of this sort of flashy writing. When César Franck remarked of Emmanuel Chabrier that his "music links our time to that of Couperin and Rameau," he could just as easily have been speaking of Berlioz. What other composer, French or otherwise, assembled these traditional qualities so consistently, so ingeniously and, in the face of desperately sad personal circumstances, for so long?

Louis Hector Berlioz was born on December 11, 1803 in La Côte Saint André, a little town in the département of Isère between Lyons and Grenoble. It was a nice place to grow up; even at the height of republican ardor La Côte never even had its own guillotine. As a concession to the spirit of the time, however, the boy was named after a classical hero, rather than an out-of-favor saint. As if to counter the bucolic placidity of La Côte, Berlioz's family was well-endowed with character. As prosperous landowners, each side of the family had the material means to indulge their particular idiosyncrasies. Berlioz's maternal grandfather, Nicolas Marmion, was an amusingly pretentious old man who liked to commemorate family events in alexandrine verse. Occasionally, this practice spilled into excess, as when he wrote his "Epithalame de Nancy ma petite fille" on the occasion of Berlioz's sister's marriage, which described,

1 *Berlioz*, by David Cairns. *Volume One: The Making of an Artist, 1803–1832* (648 pages). *Volume Two: Servitude and Greatness, 1832–1869* (896 pages). The University of California Press, $40 each.

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in Mr. Cairns's dry phrase, the "moment when [Nancy] unveils her chaste treasure before the gaze of her enraptured spouse." Berlioz's soldier-uncle, Félix Marmion, a survivor of Napoleon's gruesome Russian campaign of 1812 and Waterloo, was one of those personalities who was happiest under arms, never quite adjusting to civilian life. The composer's mother, Josephine, was a high-spirited, pious, impulsive woman who achieved a measure of notoriety by cursing her son's refusal to follow his father's wishes and abandon the study of music. She also had a mischievous streak that bordered on the sadistic. When Berlioz was about thirteen, he became seriously infatuated with a somewhat older girl, Estelle Dubeuf (the idée fixe that begins the *Symphonie Fantastique* is thought to be inspired by her). Years after he had last seen Estelle, Berlioz was visiting his parents from Paris when his mother contrived to have him deliver a letter to a Mme Fournier who happened to be passing through—and Mme Berlioz was grimly pleased at the effect that the sight of Mme Fournier (née Dubeuf) had on her son.

It was Berlioz's father who had the strongest influence on him. A well-respected though relentlessly unambitious physician, Dr. Berlioz's primary interests were the domestic economy of his estates, reading and private studies, and the education of his children, primarily Hector. Dr. Berlioz appears to have been a good teacher, giving his son a thorough grounding in Latin and classical literature, making available his considerable library, and introducing his son to the rudiments of music—and musical life in La Côte was nothing if not rudimentary. He showed his deep and abiding love for his son by wanting to give him everything he had—land, properties, and his rural practice. The catch was that Hector would have to show himself worthy of this love by becoming a doctor himself.

One of the endemic problems with Berlioz studies is the paucity of information about the composer's earliest years. While family correspondence and Dr. Berlioz's Livre de Raison (a chronicle of his estate and family kept from 1815 to 1838) have added to the picture of Berlioz's family and background, there is simply not much information about the composer's first dozen years. What emerges from Cairns's description is an extremely sensitive and emotionally acute boy whose artistic impulses and formation are drawn as much from literature as music. The memoirs recount the composer's early affection for Virgil and La Fontaine, but Mr. Cairns shows in convincing detail how Byron, Chateaubriand, Fenimore Cooper, Florian, and Scott also played an important part in developing Berlioz's sensibilities. While his friend the composer Ferdinand Hiller thought that Berlioz was seriously handicapped by his lack of an early and rigorous musical training, an opposing view might be that Berlioz was placed at an advantage by a literary exposure far more profound than that enjoyed by most artists and musicians. This literary grounding might well have been the key to Berlioz's astonishingly rapid transition from musical apprentice to master, a transition far more dependant on general emotional and artistic development than on raw musical technique. Indeed, merely eight years elapsed from the time Berlioz seriously began to study music to the time he wrote his first masterpiece, the *Symphonie Fantastique*, with as much of that time given to personal survival as to his formal studies.

At age seventeen, Berlioz left La Côte with his cousin, Alphonse Robert, for the Ecole de Médecine in Paris. The career decision was pretty much made by Dr. Berlioz: Hector loathed and detested the study of medicine, particularly in the primitive conditions of the Hospice de la Pitié with its "swarms of sparrows wrangling over scraps of lung, the rats in the corner gnawing their bleeding vertebrae," as he described the dissection room in his *Mémoires*. He stoically attended medical lectures, on his way to adding "one more obscure name to the lamentable catalogue of bad doctors" when,

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one evening, he heard Salieri's *Danaïds* at the Paris Opéra. The dutiful son, he continued his course of study, but dramatic music had taken complete hold, to the extent, Berlioz tells us, of his singing Danaüs's aria "The kindly strokes of destiny" as he sawed through his cadaver's skull. Thenceforth, the correspondence between La Côte and Paris became strained—increasingly so over the next ten years—with Berlioz telling his father that he wanted to be a musician, and the doctor urging his son to stick it out.

Sometime in 1822, Berlioz was introduced to Jean-François Lesueur, a professor at the Paris Conservatoire, who accepted him as his private pupil. Berlioz's father seems to have allowed this, perhaps thinking that Lesueur's instruction was relatively harmless. On the face of it, being accepted by Lesueur was an astonishing achievement for a nineteen-year-old whose previous musical experience was confined to hearing a wheezy local military band and teaching himself the musical basics by working through treatises and copying out scores. Berlioz was also fortunate in happening upon Lesueur, a relatively open-minded man who recognized the force and originality of Berlioz's talent.

In 1824, Berlioz received his first commission, for a *Messe solonelle*. Dr. Berlioz was appalled. His strategy in allowing Hector to study music (that it was a youthful impetuosity that would eventually disappear) was going badly awry. These days, it is difficult to comprehend the ambivalence, if not outright horror, that the thought of a professional musical career provoked among the middle and upper classes. Theaters were dedicated to amusement and diversion (audience members cheerfully laughed and talked to each other during performances), and while it was one thing to go to a performance to be entertained, the prospect of allowing one's oldest son to spend his life amusing others was, the thinking went, an abominable waste. Once, when Berlioz's aunt was holding forth on the general unsuitability of the arts as a career, Berlioz jokingly asked her if she would have changed her mind if Racine had been a member of the family. The aunt refused to budge, "Well, my dear, you know, a good name matters more than anything," a remark that convulsed Lesueur when Berlioz told him.

Although Berlioz has the reputation of being a firebrand, he was not a particularly revolutionary composer. As a student, he instinctively grasped the necessity of form and technique, despite the fact that he had, up to that point, little training in each. The first performance of the *Messe solonelle* in 1825 was well received, despite suffering from common teething problems: indifferent musicians, poorly prepared orchestral parts, and insufficient rehearsal time. What got Berlioz into trouble, however, was the cost involved in rectifying many of these problems. His father was sensitive to his relatives' profligacy, inasmuch as his brother-in-law, Félix Marmion, was into him for twelve thousand francs for regimental gambling debts. When the infuriated doctor discovered that his own son was a deadbeat (although for comparatively trifling sums), he paid the debts, then cut Hector off. To make ends meet, Berlioz lived on starvation fare, gave music lessons (sometimes disguising himself with a false nose so as to keep the fact from his parents), and worked as a chorister at the Theâtre de Nouveautés where he performed in distinctly un-Berliozian musical comedies like *The Man with a Taste for Widows* and *Mr. Jolly the Bailiff*.

It was no secret that the life of a musical professional in France was, in most cases, arduous in the extreme. There was little chance in finding a place at the Conservatoire, instrumental teaching provided little more than a subsistence existence, and instrumental composition was a hit-or-miss affair, mostly miss. The real money and recognition was in virtuosity or in the opera, and Berlioz was no virtuoso. To write for the opera effectively, a composer needed time and, above all, financial resources. By 1826, Berlioz had written several dramatic works—cantatas, a mass, and a

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three-act opera, *Les francs-juges*, but he realized that the passage to the summit of conventional respectability—the Paris Opéra—could not be easily achieved without his first gaining that impressive institutional credential, the financially indispensable Prix de Rome. He entered the 1826 competition and was promptly rejected in the preliminary round. His sin? The inability to write a fugue that measured up to formal academic requirements—notwithstanding the fact that the prize competition itself was for cantata, not fugue, writing. (Later, Berlioz took his revenge on his examiners by casting the "Witches' Sabbath" music in the *Symphonie Fantastique* as a scrupulously formal, academic fugue.)

To address his perceived technical deficiencies, Berlioz formally enrolled in the Conservatoire. Over the next year, he learned enough counterpoint to pass without incident into the finals of the 1827 competition. In the prize round, though, things fell apart. The subject of the cantata was *La Mort d'Orphée*, based on an overwrought text by Henri Berton. Aside from the fact that the competition pianist was incapable of playing from the score, Berlioz committed two unpardonable errors. First, he exercised imagination in his treatment of the text when the examiners sought didactic, if not pedantic, observance of compositional rules. Second, he departed from the set text by appending his own finale based on Virgil's account of Orpheus's death. As a result, *La Mort d'Orphée*, still performed today, was ignored by the judges. The next year, Berlioz placed second with his lovely cantata *Herminie*, set to a text by the risibly named Pierre-Ange Vieillard ("old fogey"), a lovely and lyrical, if restrained, work in which a rather jaunty first version of the idée fixe appears. While some commentators dismiss *Herminie* as a work compromised by the demands of the jury, it features several recognizable characteristics of Berlioz's mature style: the palpitating rhythms suggestive of Herminie's distressed physical and emotional state (a technique borrowed from Gluck) and a long diminuendo that sonically recreates the image of a running figure disappearing in the distance.

In 1829, perhaps figuring that the custom of the jury of awarding first place to the previous year's second prize would be followed, Berlioz again gave full rein to his imaginative powers in setting another Vieillard text, *La Mort de Cléopâtre*. The result was a masterly work of raw and original power, particularly the last scene with its depiction of Cleopatra's death agonies. Predictably, it was a disaster with the jury, who awarded no prize that year. The day after the competition, Berlioz ran into one of the jurors, Boieldieu, and told the older man that he had done his best. "You shouldn't have done. That's exactly what we have against you," the older man harrumphed. "I like soothing music." By the next year, Berlioz had learned his lesson and in yet another "death cantata," *La Mort de Sardanapale*, held his instincts sufficiently under control to win the prize.

Life, however, was not centered around the Prix de Rome. In 1828, Berlioz presented a successful concert of his works, including his overtures *Waverley* and *Les francs-juges*, *La Révolution grecque*, an instrumental work, and the Resurrexit from his *Messe solonelle*. He also began the *Huit scènes de Faust* (the foundation for his opera *La Damnation de Faust*). Matters of a more personal nature were also in evidence. In September 1827, Berlioz, along with many of the other luminaries of the romantic movement, attended the legendary performance of *Hamlet* at the Odéon in which the Irish actress Harriet Smithson appeared as Ophelia. The effect of Shakespeare on an audience accustomed to the formalities and mannerisms of classical theater was electrifying, and the effect of Harriet Smithson on Berlioz was hardly less so. But Berlioz had no English and she had no French, and his passion for Harriet was largely internalized until it found release in the *Symphonie Fantastique* in 1830. Berlioz also developed an infatuation with Camille Moke, one of the great pianists and sexual

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adventurers of the last century.[2] Moke and Berlioz had planned to elope in 1830 when he traveled to Rome for his compulsory year there as prizewinner, but she broke off the arrangements. Beside himself with rage and hurt, Berlioz developed a bizarre plan to return to Paris, disguise himself as a maid (he went so far as to have a uniform made), gain entry to the Moke household, and kill Camille and her mother. At the border, he had a change of heart and went back to Rome. When he returned to Paris, Berlioz was intent on performing the *Symphonie Fantastique* and its sequel, *Lélio, or the Return to Life*, in a single concert. With that concert, he would win Harriet Smithson, and the world would be at his feet.

Or so he thought.

Servitude and Greatness, the concluding volume of Cairns's biography, is a maddening story of unacknowledged achievement and successes just missed. The tale is unremittingly sad, made all the sadder by Mr. Cairns's balance, his brilliant verbal pictures of Berlioz's individual works, his sympathetic portrayal of Harriet Smithson, and his amused tolerance of Berlioz's occasional musical and journalistic excesses. Where Mr. Cairns falls short is in clearly explaining the big issue: how could France's greatest composer of the nineteenth century, with well-positioned political and journalistic support, and the admiration and assistance of influential contemporaries like Meyerbeer, Paganini, and, above all, Liszt, have had such a shocking run of bad luck? Berlioz himself discussed this question in his *Mémoires*, suggesting the antagonism of popular musical values to his own aesthetic, the opposition of the Conservatoire, the opposition of the "Italian sensualist school," his critical jabs, and his abilities as a conductor. To be sure, Mr. Cairns provides detail and fact as to each of these causes, but the reader still comes away with few memorable conclusions. The simplest answer is that Berlioz's music and style were simply not palatable, either to the tastemakers of the time or to the public whose taste ran to *Cats*-like equivalents such as *Mosquita la sorcière* (Boisselot), *Murdock le bandit* (Gautier), and *Bonsoir, Monsieur Pantalon* (Grisar). We read of the profound effect on Berlioz's audiences of the *Nuits d'Eté*, *Harold in Italy*, and *L'Enfance du Christ*, and can only conclude that, then as now, those audiences were small ones.

Berlioz's bad luck extended to women. After a courtship that would have tried most men beyond endurance, Berlioz married Harriet Smithson in October 1833. Unfortunately, she had accumulated as much debt from her failed theatrical productions as Uncle Felix had accumulated from regimental gambling. Though Berlioz, with the aid of friends like Liszt, eventually paid these debts off, they were a terrible burden. Too late, too, Berlioz discovered that Harriet was an "ordinary woman, with an instinctive gift for expressing agonies of the soul which she has never felt herself." Though popular in France, she was less so in England. "We trust this marriage will ensure the happiness of an amiable young woman," wrote the *Court Journal*, "as well as secure us against her reappearance on the English boards." The following year, their only son, Louis, was born.

At the time of the marriage, Mr. Cairns tells us, Harriet's career was spiraling downwards. She was no longer successfully performing the classical roles that had brought her to prominence. Mr. Cairns clearly explains the stresses of the marriage and shows how it was unlikely to survive. After their separation in 1840, Berlioz looked after Harriet, even when he was living with the shrill (but attractive) Marie Recio who later became his second wife. After Marie came a powerful infatuation with the singer Pauline Viardot, attachments in Russia and with a young married woman back in Paris, and, finally, an autumnal, unconsummated friendship with his Estelle Dubeuf.

Money was always a problem. Berlioz

2 One story has Chopin's (always tenuous) friendship with Liszt ending when he discovered that Liszt (who had asked permission to stay) had used Chopin's apartment for an assignation with Moke.

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was forced to write musical criticism to support himself and Harriet because criticism paid on delivery of copy while composition took years, if ever, to pay. He was offered a permanent position with the *Journal des débats* in 1833 and served as the chief music critic for thirty years until the qualified success of *Les Troyens à Carthage* enabled him to retire from journalism. The central theme of Berlioz's criticism, Mr. Cairns tells us, is musical waste—how Paris with its matchless resources squandered and debauched them. Though he felt enslaved by his position as a critic, it was effectively his livelihood. Indeed, when Berlioz was elected to the musical chair of the Institut de France, his bitter enemy, the critic Pietro Scudo, spoke for many when he sneered that a journalist, not a composer, had been chosen.

Even when employed as a critic, Berlioz continued to give concerts that featured works by the composers he esteemed, as well as his own compositions. He also looked for positions in the state-run musical system—in France, musical culture was administered by the Ministry of the Interior—that would give him time to compose. All of these opportunities came to naught. Mr. Cairns tells us how remunerative directorships at the Gymnase Musical, the Théâtre Italien, and the Opéra itself; professorships of harmony and composition at the Conservatoire; and a position as inspector of music were all kept from Berlioz by personal politics.

Nevertheless, Mr. Cairns insists that Berlioz's first years of marriage were comparatively happy. *Harold in Italy*, a "symphonic concerto" for viola and orchestra, was finished and successfully performed in 1834, though its intended soloist, Paganini, withdrew from the performance, probably on account of his being charged in the tabloid press with abducting an underaged woman. In 1835, an assassination attempt that killed almost twenty people in the Boulevard du Temple but which missed the king was the seed of Berlioz's requiem mass, the *Grande Messe des morts*. *Benvenuto Cellini* was performed at the Opéra in 1830. The work had only four performances when the lead, supposedly a friend of Berlioz's, quit with no understudy. Mr. Cairns perceptively describes the politics of the Opéra, that "nest of vipers," and his description of the work itself (though it occurs some sixty pages before the occasion of the performance) is quite wonderful. Equally impressive is his depiction of *Roméo et Juliette*, the great symphonic fantasy which Berlioz completed in 1839, and from which Richard Wagner, who was present at the première, learned so much, as he himself uncharacteristically admitted.

The popular success of *Roméo et Juliette* was the high point of Berlioz's career. By the early 1840s, his marriage was disintegrating, his regular bases of support were retiring or dying, and critics who viewed bel canto as the ne plus ultra of singing were descending on him with a vengeance. The miracle of this depressing time was the *Nuits d'Eté*, that cycle of desolately beautiful love songs. In 1843, Berlioz left Harriet in Paris when he went on a conducting tour of Germany. It was successful despite the fact that Marie Recio, by this time his mistress, insisted on performing at his concerts. "She sings like a cat," Berlioz told Hiller. Richard Wagner met the couple when they visited Dresden and noted that "an unpleasant woman can wantonly ruin an altogether exceptional man."

After his return, Berlioz spent the next several years as a feuilletonist, producing some of his funniest and most perceptive writing. One memorable review, decrying the musical standards of the Opéra, described a fine work as being reduced to a "strawberry bed ravaged by turkeys," and a prominent singer's vocal line like "the necklaces worn by savages, made up at random of pieces of coral, large beans, fishbones, teeth, bits of wood, and sheeps' knuckles." *Mémoires* recounts the famous story of "Weber's revenge," where a grocer who once hissed *Freischütz* eventually had his own skull used as a prop for the work. It

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was a time of great privation, and Berlioz was forced to write begging letters to the Ministry of the Interior for want of means. In 1845, when he started his second tour of Germany, he had also started on his opera *La Damnation de Faust*, based on his earlier work of 1829. When it was performed the following year, it was well reviewed, but not well received by the public. D'Ortigue, a good critic and friend, recognized that Berlioz's melodic genius was not "the Italian melody which we have made our standard and with which our ears have grown familiar" and that his concept of art was deeply at odds with the public's desire for entertainment.

What Mr. Cairns calls the "apogee of Berlioz's musical life," despite the terrible difficulties involved in having his works performed, was the seven-year period starting in 1852. Liszt staged *Benvenuto Cellini* in Weimar, *L'Enfance du Christ* triumphed, *Les Troyens* was completed, and the *Nuits d'Eté* was scored for orchestra. All of these works show a classicism and formality far more akin to his spiritual fathers—Lesueur, Spontini, and Gluck—than to the turbulent romanticism of which he was one of the titular heads. But, the bitterness of seeing *Tannhäuser* performed at the Opéra, rather than *Les Troyens*, and the sight of his friend and supporter Liszt's increasing preoccupation with Wagner's music were double blows during these years.

In his last decade, Berlioz gave up composing. Though he was still able to work, the thought of the machinations, the backstabbing, and the misunderstanding that had dogged his work for so long kept him from picking up the pen. A few years before his death in 1869, Berlioz told a young colleague, "when I am consumed with melancholy, I perform my music mentally and listen to it within myself." He grew progressively more ill. The death of his son from yellow fever sapped him of any remaining will to live. Before lapsing into a coma, his last words were "They are finally going to play my music."

Berlioz would have appreciated the grim humor of Auber, who did so much to frustrate his career; Ambroise Thomas, an amiable mediocrity; and Perrin, the representative of the Opéra, acting as his pallbearers. Equally rich was the conducting of the funeral service by Pasdeloup and Hainl, two other primary representatives of the popular strain of French music that so effectively excluded his own. All were there, as it were, to ensure that Berlioz was indeed dead. They need not have worried. One of Berlioz's early biographers, Boschot, tells the story that as the cortège approached the cemetery, the horses bolted and dragged the hearse through the gates at full speed, almost as if they had seen *La Damnation de Faust*.

Berlioz is buried in the Cimitière Montmartre, not far from where he lived. For many years, his grave lay in disrepair although, in the early Eighties, it was rebuilt in black marble as if to reflect his posthumous eminence. But one still has the sense that even now there is a lingering distrust of Berlioz and his work. Early this year, French radio broadcast a news item mentioning that because of Berlioz's national stature, Jacques Chirac, the President of France, had ordered the remains be exhumed and removed from Montmartre to the Panthéon on the two-hundredth anniversary of Berlioz's birth. When the cultural attaché's office of the French embassy was contacted by the author to confirm this fact, a representative said that he had never heard of such an idea, and that Berlioz was probably not of sufficient stature to merit such treatment.

Some things never change.

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Poems
by Robert Conquest

Phryne

"It's such a pity that we don't have
Anything like a photograph
Of her about whom the ancients rave . . ."

He'd been talking about the well-known tale
Of her lawyer at her blasphemy trial
Baring her breasts to gain an acquittal.

Now, it wasn't the 'beauty' of what they saw
That made the judges loosen the law,
But what's been described as 'sacred awe.'

Would visual be better than verbal, though,
Projected into the long-ago
Till we think we know what we'll never know?

Fragments, copies, our museums still hold
Of statues she modelled, or so we're told
(Though not the Delphi one in gold).

Well, at Thespiae, how did they feel as
Praxiteles, daring celestial malice,
Set up together, on equal pillars

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Statues of her and of Aphrodite.
A girl and a Goddess damn-near Almighty
With a temper not to be taken lightly?

He could only pre-empt their sacred fear
With what could unarguably appear
As spillover from another sphere

On to physique made partly free
From the pressures of externality
Which is all that the subtlest lens can see.

(And Marilyns, Sophias, the very cream
Of our time, aren't sewn without a seam
Directly into the fabric of dream.)

But she's gone! Long gone! Gone to the grave
And left us, instead of a photograph,
The residual glow of an ancient grief.

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Chalet

The wild wind, the white wind . . .

Inside, in their long weekend,
Perhaps their last, there seems no season
Only exhausted obsession
With their past, like a film in color
Perversely techniqued to black-and-white,
Their unfeeling set in the pallor
Of a stiff glaze.
—But now
Suddenly, a frenzy of love-hate . . .

The wolf-wind howls through the snow . . .

In the act

Accepting, at a certain age
That the world's indeed a stage
He sees the phoneys in the stalls
For the last time he bellows "Balls!"
And then the curtain falls.

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Letter from Kosovo

A certain exhaustion

by Stephen Schwartz

In 1990, when I first heard about Albanian Catholic writers, I felt a sense of déjà vu. The Berlin Wall had fallen, but for many of us who followed events in the former Communist states, it was unclear how profound or permanent the damage to the cultures of those countries would prove to be. Indeed at that time, Albania, which lagged behind the rest of Eastern Europe in gaining its freedom, was still oppressed by the one-party dictatorship of Ramiz Alia, successor to the infamous Enver Hoxha. Under the latter, Albania had become the only officially atheist state in the world, and religious culture had been rigorously and murderously suppressed. As late as 1972, a Catholic priest, Fr. Shtjefën Kurti, was executed for baptizing a child in Albania. The very concept of Albanian Catholic intellectuals seemed inextricably linked to the worst excesses of leftist totalitarianism.

My perception of an apparent historical echo had its source in a research paper I had written as a university student on the Spanish dialects of the Sephardic Jews, known as Judeo-Spanish and Ladino. I had learned, in scholarly libraries, about a whole printed literature of novels, poetry, plays, popular ballads, proverbs, religious works, and journalism that had once been read and appreciated by hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Balkans—in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, as well as in Turkey. Especially in the Macedonian city of Salonika, this culture had thrived for generations. Until the Holocaust, Salonika boasted numerous Judeo-Spanish newspapers and magazines. Except in Turkey, most of this writing had suffered a fate comparable to, if not worse than, that of Yiddish literature—the great majority of its exponents and audience had been murdered by the Nazis.

Thus, to write an academic survey of Sephardica was to delve into a truly lost literature, which could never again be expected to produce authors and to excite readers. To examine these works was a saddening, infuriating, and finally deeply depressing exercise in literary archaeology. I assumed the same was true of the Catholic writers in Albanian. Their leading figures, I was told, had been killed by the Communists; their works were absolutely banned; their faith and even their regional dialect—indigenous to northern Albania and Kosovo—suppressed. Once again, having access to old volumes, I turned the pages of a lost literature; once again, I felt a communion with the voices of the dead, never again to be heard.

But I was wrong. Since coming to Kosovo last year and regularly visiting Albania, I have seen that the Catholic literature of the Albanians, along with religious and classic works in general, is undergoing an amazing renaissance, that has everything to do with the end of Communism and remarkably little to do with the NATO intervention last year.

On the main street of Prishtina, the capi-

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tal of Kosovo, one encounters numerous bookstores along with improvised bookstalls on card tables and even the hoods of cars. In contrast with Sarajevo, where such microenterprises involve the looting of individual books from destroyed homes, these piles of paperbacks and hardbounds are typically newly printed in Kosovo or imported from Albania, where the end of Communist censorship has stimulated an explosion of publishing. For both their own people and the outside world, the Albanian language and culture are coming into their own.

Only two of the Albanian Catholic writers—the poet and essayist Arshi Pipa (1920–97) and the linguist, novelist, and modernist poet Martin Camaj (1925–92)—have been translated into English. The rest of them are unknown to the general Anglo-American audience: they include the author of the first novel in Albanian, Ndoc Nikaj (1864–1946); three outstanding folklorists, Mons. Vinçenc Prennushi (1885–1949), Bernardin Palaj (d. 1946, also an important poet), and Donat Kurti (1903–83); a social and cultural commentator of outstanding gifts, Anton Harapi (1888–1946); a great poet of faith as well as physical passion (and its voluntary renunciation), Lazër Shantoja (1892–1945); and the poet and essayist Ernest Koliqi (1903–75). Aside from Pipa, Camaj, and Koliqi, who escaped to the West, all of these men were slaughtered by Enver Hoxha.

The fate of Ndoc Nikaj is especially outrageous—if such distinctions may be made at all. After the fall of the Communist regime in Albania, Ramiz Alia was put on trial. At the conclusion of the proceeding, in 1994, he asked for mercy. I was told at the time, by my friend Gjon Sinishta (1930–95), the intellectual leader of the Albanian Catholics in exile, that someone in the courtroom cried out, "Don't ask for mercy! What mercy did you show Ndoc Nikaj, the dean of Albanian writers, whom you and your kind killed when he was eighty-two years old!" I was, at first, inclined to doubt this tale, as too good to be believed. I have since become a believer, having had the extraordinary pleasure of seeing Ndoc Nikaj's novels, and works about him, on sale everywhere in the Albanian lands. Rev. Nikaj wrote more than four-hundred works and was a leading standard-bearer of the national culture for several generations; he authored the first printed history of the Albanians, issued in Brussels at the end of the nineteenth century. His first novel, *Shkodra e Rrethueme* ("Shkodra Besieged"), was published in 1914. It begins with street rhymes: "*Tak-tuk, Tak-tuk! Shkodra mbet pa buk! . . . Tuk-tak . . . e buk' aspak! . . . Tak-tik! s'mbet metelik!*" That is, "Shkodra has no bread! . . . Bread there is none! . . . Nor is there money!" It is a short and rather simple work, telling a predictably romantic tale. Although considered an historical novel, it deals with events only a year past when the book appeared: the assault on the northern Albanian city of Shkodra by Montenegrins, during the First Balkan War, in 1912. Its protagonists, the lovers Ndoc and Leze, who are children of the Shkodra elite, undergo various adventures in the middle of the fighting, becoming separated while learning political and moral lessons. The regime of Enver Hoxha accused the aged Rev. Nikaj of plotting the violent overthrow of the Communist government.

Archbishop Prennushi, a Franciscan, published, in Bosnia in 1911, one of the most important collections of Albanian folklore and translated some dozen European works of literature into Albanian. His crime was a refusal to cooperate with the Communist authorities after an approach had been made to him by Hoxha. He was sentenced to twenty years hard labor, and was kept among the most dangerous prisoners. He was tortured, but his intense Christian faith gave him a strength and dignity that seems superhuman. He suffered from a hernia which made it painful to walk. Nevertheless, he was beaten with wooden staves, his hands and feet were bound, and he was hanged from the ceiling of the interrogator's lavatory until he

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fainted. Archbishop Prennushi described the situation to the young Arshi Pipa, a fellow-prisoner, with amazing humor: "I was like a side of beef in a smokehouse." He was ordered to perform heavy labor stacking logs, and joined the work party without protest. The Catholic cleric, near the end of his days, sacrificed himself for the serenity of others imprisoned with him, maintaining secret communications, at considerable risk, with priests condemned to death. Archbishop Prennushi died of a severe asthma attack. His fellow-prisoners attempted to succor him, massaging his feet and keeping a fire going at night in the cells, after finding ways to secure more wood from the guards. Just before his death, he told Pipa he finally understood Goethe's deathbed declaration: "Mehr Licht!" ("More light!") That light, according to the archbishop, was spiritual, not physical.

Prennushi had, long before, written a poem, "The Nightingale of Rozafat," in which he argued that the nightingale had learned its song from the laments of prisoners in a Turkish dungeon. It is hard to imagine a lyrical figure more symbolic of the Balkan destiny. Similarly, Abdullah Karjagdiu, professor of English literature at the University of Prishtina, described the Catholic authors like Prennushi and Pipa as having

> created a horizon of expectation in the Kosovar public. They were enemies of Communism and defenders of local and Christian tradition. They were condemned as decadent and reactionary, as foreign spies and worthless scribblers. This excited great subterranean interest in them among Albanian readers.

I will not continue with an extensive description of the martyrdom suffered by all these men, since this would have no other effect than to weigh down the heart of the reader with anger and pain. We are not all Solzhenitsyn; we have not all undergone and borne witness to these horrors, nor have we all the capacity to record or even to comprehend them. Suffice it to say that when, in Prishtina, I first saw the portrait of Anton Harapi, a heroic Catholic priest and Albanian patriot killed by Hoxha, on the cover of a recent issue of the literary magazine *Jeta e Re* ("New Life"), I was moved to tears. Although the name *New Life* was given to that journal, once an official publication, as a metaphor of Titoite Communism, an immensely satisfying resuscitation has occurred. The Albanian Catholic authors, unlike the Balkan Sephardic poets, have returned to their world. And their works are read with enthusiasm. In a visit to the Franciscan monastery of Gjakova, a center of Albanian Catholic culture for generations, I and my research assistant Edmond Shyti (pronounced Shootee) received copies of *National Unity and National Ideals*, a volume of Harapi's patriotic essays on civic themes, democratic values, and social responsibility, dating from the 1920s. A few days later, Edi told me, "nothing has changed. I read those words and I felt as if he were writing about us today."

The town of Gjakova is itself a very special place—the Jerusalem of Kosovo—in that, while most Kosovar Albanians are Sunni Muslims, Gjakova has a Catholic majority, as well as the strong presence of Sufism—a spiritual form of Islam of considerable openness and intellectuality. It is also a center of the fascinating, heterodox Bektashi sect of Muslims, which has come under the influence of Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. The leader of the Bektashis in Gjakova, Baba Mumin Lama, told me that in Bektashi *teqet* or "lodges" four books are always present: the Torah, the Psalms, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. But Gjakova also suffered enormously in the recent war—with damage inflicted by all the sides. Serbs devastated Baba Mumin's own *teqe*, along with its library, which included a thousand-page manuscript describing the pilgrimage to India and back, on foot, of another Bektashi divine, Baba Qazim, who was curious about Buddhism. Yugoslav soldiers, police, and paramilitaries destroyed the sixteenth-century Hadum mosque, with its large library

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and *medresa* (religious high school), and committed a horrifying massacre in the *teqe* of another Sufi, Sheh Dervishdana, murdered with his two sons, a friend, and a neighbor. The Dervishdana incident figures in the indictment of Slobodan Milošević at The Hague.

But Serbs were not the only perpetrators of cultural destruction in Gjakova. The shock wave from a NATO bomb dropped on a Yugoslav barracks wrecked the Franciscan monastery and the nearby Catholic church of Sts. Peter and Paul—the latter still an empty ruin. And of course, as the world knows, Albanians took revenge on the Serbs after the NATO entry into Kosovo. In Gjakova, a large, new Serbian Orthodox church was blown up, and Serbs recall bitterly that the Albanians danced all night around the rubble.

The politics of restoring and protecting such cultural treasures is complex. The Albanians saw more than two hundred mosques and other Islamic structures wrecked by Yugoslav forces; some eighty Serbian churches and monasteries have been damaged. On both sides, whole buildings were reduced to nearly unrecognizable piles of masonry. But even when there is the possibility of their reconstruction, international intrigues may get in the way.

For example, the Saudis, who throw a considerable quantity of money around the Balkans for rebuilding mosques, are Wahhabis, a fundamentalist sect of Islam with its own notable principles of architecture. Their style of mosque design can best be described as Islamic kitsch. They do not approve of interior mosque decorations, and Wahhabi doctrine considers the maintenence of gravestones to be idolatry. For this reason, at the end of July, Saudis who had taken over the refurbishment of the Hadum mosque complex in Gjakova suddenly turned up in the old Ottoman cemetery inside the walls and began removing centuries-old tombstones. The Albanians reacted with predictable rage, especially since their familial traditions, as well as their need to establish their historic claim over the land, are strong inducements to the preservation of graveyards. But Gazmend Naka, an expert with the Institution for Protection of Kosova Monuments, told me, "The Saudis say NATO and the UN will let them do whatever they want, and that we Albanians have nothing to say about it. The Serbs killed us physically, but these fanatics want to kill our cultural heritage."

For this reason, Naka called on NATO's Kosovo Forces command, which has mounted guards at Serbian churches threatened by Albanians, to place similar protective units at Islamic structures—but NATO is trying to get out of the monument protection business. Sitting in armored cars and tanks watching Serbian Orthodox churches is not a productive use of military resources, and there is no interest in extending the program to mosques. Fortunately on August 5, the U.N.-backed authorities barred the Saudis from the Hadum mosque rehabilitation project.[1]

Serbian Orthodox and Albanian Catholic and Islamic religious sites are not the only centers of attention for cultural restoration in Kosovo today. An energetic Albanian journalist of Bektashi origin, Myrteza Studenica, has established a Kosovar-Jewish Committee with the aim of refurbishing the old Sephardic cemetery in Prishtina, re-establishing the old synagogue in the original marketplace (the latter destroyed under Tito in the 1950s, along with a historic mosque), and identifying other Jewish holy places in the territory. If the synagogue were rebuilt it might attract a congregation from among the foreign personnel assigned here—after all, the internationally appointed ruler of Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, has lately taken to recalling the death of his grandparents in Auschwitz—but the conception is, to say the least, visionary on Studenica's part. Jews have not made up a large element of the population in Kosovo since the Habsburg-

1 For a more thorough discussion of this topic, see my article "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Balkans," in *Partisan Review* (July 2000).

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Ottoman wars of the eighteenth century, when most of them fled.

The Jews who survived the Holocaust mainly left Kosovo after World War II, but are remembered with nostalgia by Albanians. A remarkable number of the latter also protected Jews during the Nazi occupation. Luan Shllaku, the director of George Soros's Kosovo Fund for an Open Society, told me with a certain diffidence that his family, well-known in Gjakova, had sheltered a Jewish man, whom they considered a brother and who slept in the same bed with Luan's uncle. The survivor had gone to Israel after 1945, but his relatives had come back to the Balkans in 1999, when they realized that the Shllakus were probably among the thousands and thousands of Albanians who had been expelled to Albania and Macedonia. The survivor's children found the Shllakus in a camp and offered them a return favor, in the form of refuge in Israel.

Which, in a distant sort of way, brings up another issue: interethnic reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs. This question is mainly articulated in the global media by foreigners, whose accounting of it has been less than satisfactory to an observer on the ground like myself. The international authorities in Kosovo—NATO and the UN—have concentrated on a "politically correct" approach that is completely unrealistic: more or less ordering the two nations, which, unlike those in Bosnia-Hercegovina, have no common language and no tradition of intermarriage, to embrace. Sorry, that isn't going to work. Too much violence has taken place, and too much is continuing. But among ordinary Serbs and Albanians, a certain exhaustion is noticeable. More, anybody who spends time among local folks, rather than hanging around humanitarian functionaries pretending to be war dogs, hears people from both sides talk about their friends among "the others." Most Albanians know at least one Serb they would protect, and vice versa. But of course that doesn't make the evening news, where "if it bleeds, it leads."

Albanians and Serbs alike are getting pretty sick of the Balkan cockpit. The former look with great yearning at Europe and America—at the civilization from which they have long been excluded, thanks to their isolated language and unfortunate political destiny. The latter feel they have been led to ruination by Milošević—who, let it be understood, is not a Serb nationalist, but an old-fashioned Stalinist Communist adept at using fascist-style ethnic mobilization to keep himself in power. If the foreigners can establish law and order, and then leave the Serbs and Albanians to tend their own gardens, repair their homes and holy places, build up businesses, and raise children, Kosovo may surprise everybody. Physically, it is beautiful—truly God's country, to employ the dreadful old cliché. Certainly, it and its people deserve some peace. It's a big job, and in the end, like it or not, only NATO can do it. But they can't wait around for love to blossom. It's time to get it done, and over with, and get ready to depart.

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Theater

Go and Spoon no more

by Mark Steyn

I came across a wonderful dramatic notice the other day, though not by a full-time reviewer. A century ago, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came to my small New England town and one of my neighbors' forebears, the local correspondent for the area's weekly newspaper, reported on the production thus:

> The Henry family rendered the drama of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at Church hall last Saturday evening in a truly unique manner. Playgoers say they never saw it rendered in such a way before. The little folks did themselves credit as Topsy and little Eva, and Mr. Henry proved his versatility by playing six parts, but he forgot to return some furniture borrowed of a neighbor, also to give the admission tickets promised for the use of it. Forgot to mention the breaking of a valuable reflector belonging to the hall, and some tools borrowed of a neighbor disappeared with the troupe and cannot be found.

Well, that's the theatrical class for you. Yet many of us professional critics will also recognize ourselves in that short notice: we know those occasions when the eighth-row center comps mysteriously fail to materialize at the box-office, and we find ourselves wedged into a restricted-view seat trying not to let churlish and resentful thoughts about the press agent infect our impression of the play. We know, too, those evenings when no matter how valiantly one struggles to attend to the production all sorts of distracting backstage flimflam keeps getting in the way. Few of us are as fastidious as the critic from *The Times* of London who called in his first-night notice of a West End play and was upbraided by his editor the following morning for having neglected to mention that in the course of the evening the theater had caught alight and burnt down. He replied sniffily that it was not his job to report fires.

True, in a very narrow sense. But the trouble for most of us is a slightly different one. It's what's happening on stage that too often fails to catch fire, and the critic, as with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at Church hall, finds his attention wandering to extraneous matters, many of which seem far more engaging and potentially dramatic than anything taking place within the proscenium. For example, having now seen two plays by Stephen Spoonamore, I have absolutely no inclination to see anything else by him as long as I live. But I find myself absolutely fascinated by the man himself: he's on his way to becoming off-Broadway's Frank Wildhorn—no amount of over-writing, structural ineptness, and absurd devices seems to be an obstacle to getting the play on. So it is that quite early during *Where Everything Is Everything* (at the Ryan Theatre at New York Performance Works), it becomes clear that Spoonamore has accomplished something quite remarkable: he's managed to come up with an even worse play than *Noah's Archives*, his eco-

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drama of last year all of whose profits were supposed to go to Riverkeeper, an organization set up to protect the Hudson. The play didn't last long and the Hudson, to this casual observer, seems much as it was.

Now Spoonamore has moved on from environmental issues—and cheap shots at cell phones, SUVs, and Olestra—to modern Manhattan—and cheap shots at everything. His new title sums up his view of the town: in Manhattan, he tells us, "everything is everything." Unfortunately, on Chambers Street, the particular block of off-Broadway on which Spoonamore has chosen to unburden himself of this insight, everything is nothing, and there are many longueurs during which one finds oneself considering not the play but the peculiar character of its creator.

But first, as with *Uncle Tom*, a perfunctory consideration of the actual drama: *Where Everything Is Everything* is basic boy-meets-girl. Boy in this case is a thirty-two-year-old cocky, unlikeable, toilet-mouthed Wall Street type (what else?), girl is a twenty-five-year-old graphic designer who melts his heart. On the bumpy road to love, Spoonamore has provided a series of interstate rest areas—interludes in which his principals don Big Apple costumes and other splashy garb and serve as tour guides to modern Manhattan manners. It's hard to say which bits are the duller, more pointless, less witty, more cringe-making—the love story or the more general observations. Then, at the end of the first act, Spoonamore unveils his gimmick: a flip of the coin will decide whether the second act of this romance will conclude as a comedy or as a tragedy: *Where Everything Is Everything*—now in every available variety.

When Rupert Holmes adapted Dickens's unfinished *Mystery Of Edwin Drood* for the Public Theatre, he let the audience vote each night on how the drama should resolve itself. But there's something vaguely underwhelming about a dramatist who's provided such meager content announcing he can't make up his mind about form, either. Comedy and tragedy are closer than you'd think: In 1927, Ann Preston Bridgers came to George Abbott with *Coquette*, a play about a young woman and her shiftless boyfriend who, when her father refuses to countenance their marriage, accidentally lets slip to the old boy that they've already slept together. In Bridgers's version, the story was played for laughs. Mr. Abbott decided to keep the plot, the characters and much of the dialogue, but play it as melodrama. It was the hit of the season. "A fragile and exquisite tragedy," wrote John Anderson in *The Evening Post*. "A truly rare and touching evening." "You've never heard such weeping in the theater in your life," Abbott told me years later. Conceivably, you could do the same with many plays. But, when *Where Everything Is Everything* flips a coin to decide whether it will wrap up as comedy or tragedy, it presupposes Spoonamore is capable of writing both. Or either. Indeed, given the comprehensiveness of the play's inadequacies, why not toss in a few more choices? Grand opera. Contemporary dance. Medieval mystery play. After all, Spoonamore can't do those either.

But that doesn't stop him. In *Noah's Archives*, a second coming of the Ark, this time to a Canal Street bar, you could dimly sense moments in the production when Darcy Marta, Spoonamore's director, was attempting to rein in his windy speeches, or at least hurry 'em up, or distract attention from them. No such luck at *Where Everything Is Everything*. Evidently, mulling over *Noah*'s sinking, Spoonamore concluded the only things his bloated script could have benefited from were a better producer and director—like, er, himself. So this year he's come back as a triple-threat—playwright/producer/director. As Dame Edna Everage once asked Jeffrey Archer, "Is there no beginning to your talents?" As to the matter of comedy and tragedy, the comedy is thin gruel indeed and the only tragedy is Daisy Eagan's valiant effort as the female half of this two-hander. Miss Eagan won a Tony for her role in *The Secret Garden* back in

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1991. It seems only the day before yesterday that producers were talking of her as a potential Broadway star, but the years tick away, the parts never materialize, and one decade later the only thing anyone's offering is some turgid Equity-minimum drivel nothing will come of. It's hard not to feel aggrieved seeing Miss Eagan reduced to trying to moderate Spoonamore's monstrous ego for the benefit of what passes for his audience.

Irving Caesar, the lyricist of "Tea For Two" and "Swanee," in a less notable phase of his career unveiled a show on Broadway called *My Dear Public*. He wrote the lyrics, co-wrote the book and the music, and produced it himself. The critics were merciless. Oscar Hammerstein called him up to sympathize. "Okay, they didn't like it," said Caesar. "But why pick on me?" Why pick on Spoonamore? In part, because he's so much more intriguing than his awful plays. In an age when even big names can't get produced, when new works by, say, Kander and Ebb can't make it to the stage, how does a guy like Spoonamore manage to become one of the most prolific New York playwrights of the day? How has he wiggled free of the artistic compromises the likes of Arthur Miller and Stephen Sondheim must suffer to stand as a self-contained play machine, producing and directing every last semi-colon of his swollen sermons? What sort of people are insane enough to sit through *Noah's Archives* and go "Wow! This is great. We must bankroll his new play. And this time we'll let him direct!"? These and other questions are more interesting than any of his characters. But all I know of the guy is what he told *The Boston Globe*: "I am trying very hard," he said, explaining the purpose of his work, "to chronicle the fall of humanity." In between chronicling the fall of humanity, he has served as playwright-in-residence at Kimball Union Academy, a private school in Meriden, New Hampshire. I'd been vaguely considering KUA for my young daughter when the time comes. But that's one paying customer they can forget about. A decade hence, I still won't have forgiven them for *Where Everything Is Everything*. If this is a romance, I say to him: Go, and spoon no more.

From Spoonamore to a fellow who had a handle on both tragedy and comedy: W. Shakespeare. One of the great disappointments of New York theater is that no matter how few or how many productions there are, the range rarely varies: in lean years, there are merely ten gay plays; in prosperous ones, a couple of dozen. For breadth of offerings, no city matches London, and, though much of what's on in any week is drivel, an agreeable aspect of theatergoing life in Britain is the amount of obscure old stuff that nobody else would think of dusting off. With *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (at the Globe), it is once again, at least initially, the provenance that titillates: The play is now generally agreed to be a collaborative effort by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. The billing isn't quite as startling as "Music by W. A. Mozart and John Denver," but it helps put into context the famous screen credit of the 1929 *Taming of the Shrew* "by William Shakespeare. With additional dialogue by Sam Taylor." *Kinsmen* is the only recognized collaboration in the Bard's canon, and one would love to know how it came about. In 1613–14 (just after *The Tempest*), John Fletcher was a rising star, the coming man, younger, hipper, hotter. Which impresario decided to pair him with the old Stratford veteran?

Ah, well. I think the text offers a few clues as to what happened. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is adapted from *The Knight's Tale*, but somehow manages to lose all Chaucer's irony along the way. What's left is a story of Palamon and Arcite, two cousins and fast friends, both imprisoned by the conquering King Theseus of Athens and both determined that their love and comradeship shall carry them through their time of trial. A few seconds later, they fall out over a girl they spot from their cell window, Theseus's sister-in-law, as it transpires. Each man knows nothing of her yet burns with such a

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passion that he would willingly kill the other. Driven insane by unrequited infatuation and further damaged by the vindictive and life-threatening caprices of fate, the cousins wind up being put through the mill by the standards of both Fletcherian melodrama and Shakespearean tragedy.

Scholars generally take the line that Shakespeare busied himself with the Athenian court stuff, freeing up Fletcher to handle the romantic heroics of the two principals. But who knows? Sixteen-thirteen was after all the Stone Age of play-doctoring. In the finished version of *Coquette*—whoever wrote what, Abbott or Miss Bridgers—the lines and scenes come together as a seamless whole. Likewise, say, *A Chorus Line*, where the two credited authors, Nick Dante (who knew about dance) and James Kirkwood (who knew about playwriting), were eventually supplemented by Neil Simon (who knew about gags). In Hollywood, the various permutations became formalized: "by Joe Hack & Fred Journeyman" means the boys wrote it together; "by Joe Hack and Fred Journeyman" means Hack ran into difficulties and was replaced by Journeyman. But, back in 1613, it doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone that you're not meant to be able to spot the join. The result is a deliciously schizophrenic piece alternating between efficient if florid melodramatics (presumably Fletcher) and piercingly true insights into the human condition (presumably Shakespeare). In other words, this is essentially a piece of Fletcherian hokum that Shakespeare was brought in to add a touch of class to.

Then again, we should beware of crude deductions. Herbert Kretzmer's contribution to *Les Misérables* is persistently undervalued because the credit reads: "Lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer. Additional lyrics by James Fenton." Everyone assumes the moon/June stuff is Kretzmer (who used to write the English words for Charles Aznavour songs) and anything witty is by Fenton, respected poet and Oxford professor. Actually, Fenton got kicked off *Les Miz* early on and was replaced by Kretzmer, and the "additional" credit was part of the severance package: there's not, in fact, one line by the great poet in the finished script. There's something similar with the two authors of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In Tim Carroll's staging at the Globe, the tone—or tones—is set by the opening: a blizzard of confetti for the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, followed by three grieving queens in gold masks lamenting their unburied husbands. The strange seesawing pattern of *Kinsmen*—in which pageant and ritual are forever being rudely interrupted by something darker—might be due to unresolved arguments between the writing team, or it might actually be the intended structure of the play on which Fletcher and Shakespeare agreed instantly before heading off down the pub together for a night of wenching.

Carroll's production serves each man equally well—and ill. For a theater specializing in the period, the verse-speaking is abysmal, except for those moments when it approaches the mediocre. Perhaps, if you have to speak the lines, you become all too aware that the characters are the ungainly progeny of an unsuitable coupling. For whatever reason, only Jasper Britton and Will Keen, as the two kinsmen, seem to inhabit their words with any confidence, maybe because the bulk of their words are Fletcher's. Otherwise, Carroll is at ease with the play as is—melodrama, jokes, song, dance, masque, all cheerfully jostling together. His decisions are sound. He understands that Palamon and Arcite can't support the play as gallant chevaliers, so he allows them to seem foolish and misguided, as romantic idealists often are. I suspect Fletcher or Shakespeare, or whoever wrote the line "How do I look?" as they're trying on suits of armour for their duel to the death, also understood that a little affectionate mockery never hurts.

Is it a tragedy? Is it a comedy? Fletcher and Shakespeare boldly eschew such categories—and I don't mean by that that they

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make like off-Broadway and flip a coin. We know Shakespeare was master of both forms, and Fletcher certainly knew the rules, but what makes their collaboration so fascinating is that one or other or both elected to toss 'em overboard. A comedy would have found a way to pull off a double-wedding finale: there's nothing to choose between the kinsmen, so simple justice dictates that, if there's a happy ending in the works, both are entitled to it. A tragedy would implicate both men in their eventual fates. Instead, there's the kind of last-minute twist more appropriate to a thriller, a bewildering accident that leaves the audience with the pain of death but, as Carroll puts it, with "none of the consolations of tragedy."

Mark Rylance, the artistic director of the Globe, says that in a hundred years' time *The Two Noble Kinsmen* will be one of Shakespeare's most performed plays. It may not be necessary to wait that long. Without really trying, I've now managed to see two first-class productions (the RSC chose the piece to open up their new Swan Theatre in Stratford in 1986) which isn't bad for a work entirely unperformed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has a weird, almost postmodern sensibility, which I'd like to think is the result of two co-authors who didn't quite rate the other's work. Whatever the reason, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is an excellent example of the way the best London theater helps keep the past vital and adventurous.

Still in the West End, *A Busy Day* (at the Lyric) goes one better than *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: Jonathan Church's production of this two-hundred-year-old play is not a revival but its first ever staging. It's a Regency comedy by Fanny Burney, goodish novelist and great diarist and, on the evidence of this work, not quite a playwright. A novel can get away with distractions and sluggish passages: it's heavygoing, you put it down, you go away, you come back, you get over the hump. When a play hits a bad patch, you can't do anything about it: you have to swallow it whole. Burney's is poorly constructed: she would have benefited from having an old workhorse like Fletcher to knock it into shape and streamline the characters. Nonetheless, that's no reason for sitting on the thing for two centuries. Burney had a full life, extending to the amorous attentions of George III, but only one of her eight plays was produced during her lifetime. *A Busy Day* wasn't discovered until after her death, at age eighty-eight, in 1840. It is a droll meditation on class—less Sheridan than a Regency pre-echo of Wilde. Miss Eliza Watts (a plumply desirable Sara Markland in an excellent performance) is a wealthy heiress who wants to marry George Cleveland, son of an impoverished knight. Lady Wilhelmina opposes the match on the grounds that Eliza is "a little Cit"—i.e., of a mercantile family from the City of London. The men in the family are more practical: "Hang her birth! What is her fortune?"

In other words, we're in old family/new money country, the ongoing feud between aristocrats and arrivistes, a theme that is always topical. (You could easily write a new play on the subject for old-economy heiresses and dot-com billionaires.) The cast is on top form, especially Stephanie Beacham playing Lady Wilhelmina with all the effortless aplomb she brought to Sable Colby in *Dynasty* plus a bouffant hairdo to die for. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *A Busy Day* are both biographical footnotes, curiosities that caught the eye because of the names on the manuscript. But, in these productions, they more than justify the excavation.

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Art

Rudy Burckhardt, 1914–1999

by Karen Wilkin

The news that Rudy Burckhardt had ended his life last year, aged eighty-five, was startling and saddening. It seemed impossible that the small, vital, bearded man with the bemused expression would no longer be part of the New York art world, that he would no longer be turning his exacting, but oddly dispassionate gaze on the most unlikely—and sometimes the most seemingly obvious—parts of his adopted, much-loved city. ("What I love about New York," Burckhardt once said, "is that it just grew up wildly"—this in contrast to his native Basel, which he described as "lonely and empty and proper and clean.") It was easier to think that he was simply spending longer than usual at his house in Maine, where he had been scrutinizing bark and leaves with the same attention that in the city he accorded urban roofscapes, building façades, and shoals of pedestrians. Yet the news also provoked admiration. Burckhardt's having made death a choice—while still fully able to make that choice—his turning the inevitable into an act of will, rather than of passive acceptance, seemed to be both courageous and, curiously, just what one might expect of someone as thoughtful, self-effacing, and fiercely independent-minded as this remarkable photographer, filmmaker, and painter.

Burckhardt long enjoyed a reputation as one of New York's secret treasures—his friend the poet John Ashbery called him a "subterranean monument"—prized for his wit and his perceptions by those who knew him well, and admired from a distance by those captivated by his photographs and films, and those in awe of his place in American cultural life. From his arrival in New York in 1935, aged twenty-one, to the year of his death, Burckhardt was connected to a staggering number of this country's most inventive painters, poets, composers, dancers, and critics. The list of his friends and fans reads like the index of a comprehensive, wide-ranging history of the arts in New York. Leafing through that index, you might begin by looking up Edwin Denby, the poet and brilliant dance critic, who was a lifelong friend and responsible for Burckhardt's leaving Switzerland for New York, to the dismay of his distinguished Swiss family. (Burckhardt's mother, her son recalled, used to refer to Denby as "the one who abducted you.") And then you would go on to discover such luminaries as Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Kurt Weill, Lotte Lenya, Orson Welles, Joseph Cornell, Willem de Kooning, Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, Nell Blaine, Alex Katz, Red Grooms, Rackstraw Downes, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, Barbara Guest, and many more such notable names. Described as being simultaneously "the ultimate 'insider' and a disinterested observer," Burckhardt shared in the aesthetic adventures of this heady crowd. He was intrigued by the irrational, open to the possibilities of chance. His

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short, playful, parodic movies, acted by his artist and writer friends, were like filmed happenings, and his records of the urban streetscape and street life were deliberately unstructured in any conventional sense. "When I film," Burckhardt explained, "I don't really know what's going to happen; I don't direct, and that can be a lot of fun." Yet no matter how close he was to his circle of notable friends, he, distanced by his camera lens, remained somewhat detached, a watchful eye, a non-participant.

For years, Burckhardt was discussed as a kind of underappreciated marvel, but as he grew older, his audience seemed to broaden and, from the 1980s on, it became a little easier to see his work. There were some gallery exhibitions of his photographs, a couple of books were published (admittedly by small presses), and his films were occasionally shown in special programs; in 1991, he received the Brendan Gill Award from New York's Municipal Art Society, and, in 1998, a major exhibition was organized in Valencia, Spain (selected by Vincent Katz, poet, critic, and collaborator with Burckhardt on several books and films, and coincidentally the son of the painter Alex). Burckhardt's death provoked a series of commemorative tributes that should help to make more people aware of the extraordinary qualities of his vision and his equally extraordinary place in the recent history of New York cultural life. Last fall, an evening of Burckhardt's films was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, a cross-section ranging from vintage meditations on midtown Manhattan streets and the more desolate parts of Queens, to recent improvisations shot in places like Hong Kong, often in collaboration with his wife, Yvonne Jacquette. Last spring, we were treated to some splendid exhibitions that celebrated Burckhardt's multiple achievements as photographer, filmmaker, observer, and cherished friend: "Rudy Burckhardt and Friends: New York Artists of the 1950s and '60s," at New York University's Grey Art Gallery[1]—astonishingly, the first American museum exhibition devoted to his work—and a double-header at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, "Rudy Burckhardt: Selected Photographs 1940–1999" and "Remembering Rudy," a group of portraits by his artist friends and relatives.[2]

The Grey Gallery show was a broad, but clearly focused overview that intensified your sense of the simultaneous individuality and offhandedness of the photographer-filmmaker's idiosyncratic point of view not only because it isolated particular aspects of his work, but also because it placed it in the context of his colleagues' efforts in other disciplines. "Rudy Burckhardt and Friends" had as its point of departure the photographs he took for *Artnews* in the 1950s and 1960s as illustrations for a monthly series of articles on emerging painters and sculptors at work, titled "'So-and-so' Paints a Picture." At NYU, Burckhardt's photos were paired with contemporary works by his subjects, occasionally the actual picture that he captured in progress during his shoot or one that was visible among the other works in the artist's studio; at the very least, the exhibited work was made about the time the profile was written or was typical of the period documented by the photographs.

Apart from its appeal as an homage to Burckhardt, the show offered a refreshing selection of art worth paying attention to for its own merits as well as the relation to the subjects of Burckhardt's photographs. The show also included some portraits and works by artists whom Burckhardt was close to, whether or not they had been the subjects of *Artnews* profiles, such as the tender image-of-an-image of his wife, *Yvonne in Frame*, made in 1963, along with a

1 "Rudy Burckhardt and Friends: New York Artists of the 1950s and '60s" was on view from May 9 to July 15, 2000 at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University.

2 "Rudy Burckhardt: Selected Photographs 1940–1999" and "Remembering Rudy" were on view from June 14 to July 28, 2000 at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

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few of her sensitive early drawings from the late 1960s.

On the gallery's lower level, a well-chosen selection of Burckhardt's photographs of New York enlarged the scope of the show, along with a continuously running selection of his movies. (Upstairs beside Burckhardt's photos of Cornell and one of his boxes, the quirky films these two oddball artists made together were screened; Cornell, Burckhardt observed, "was a sucker for birds in winter and little girls wandering around in a daze.") This mélange of authors, approaches, and media offered not only a marvelous summary of Burckhardt's free-wheeling achievements, but also a tantalizing glimpse into the New York art world during the fascinating, loose-jointed decades between the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism and the tyranny of post-modernism.

Perhaps it was a reflection of the catholic taste of Thomas B. Hess, *Artnews*'s editor during the years that Burckhardt photographed for the magazine, or, more simply, the result of a responsible publication's effort to be comprehensive, but whatever the motivation, the artists chosen to be subjects of the "Paints a Picture" series were an eclectic group ranging from first-generation Abstract Expressionists to perceptual realists to high-minded geometric abstract painters to unclassifiable artists on the fringe of the Pop movement. Among the relatively "senior" artists photographed by Burckhardt and represented in the Grey Gallery show were Jackson Pollock, Hans Hofmann, Mark Rothko, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, and Joseph Albers, along with the slightly younger Jack Tworkov and Philip Guston, all of them with respectable exhibition histories by the early 1950s, although none of them megastars by today's standards. The younger generation was represented by—among others—Jane Freilicher, Nell Blaine, Joan Mitchell, Michael Goldberg, Al Held, Paul Georges, Ann Arnold, Marisol, and Alex Katz.

What is most striking about the photos was the way Burckhardt, without seeming to impose himself or dictate the actions of his subjects, consistently seemed to make the artists reveal something about their work. There was nothing formulaic or predictable about his approach. Sometimes Burckhardt came in close, to concentrate on revealing details; sometimes he stayed back and let the whole scene speak for itself. It's as though the camera simply transcribed his gaze—the gaze of a curious, intelligent observer who was making an effort to discover as much as possible about what he was looking at. What's truly remarkable is that this gaze seems miraculously to get it absolutely right every time. (Burckhardt's photographs of the city and its inhabitants could be described the same way.) In his *Artnews* photos, Burckhardt captured the fastidiousness of Albers, the self-conscious theatricality of Marisol, the somber brooding of Rothko, who seems dwarfed by the painting looming beside him. He showed us Guston, around 1960, as a blocky, chunky figure with a big, square head, against the brushy, wristy expanse of one of his canvases of the period, a portrait that weirdly anticipates the painter's late shorthand images of himself as a big-headed, thickset smoker. The photos of de Kooning and Hofmann, from 1950, are especially sympathetic. Hofmann, shown from a fairly close viewpoint, looking at drawings and wearing natty striped overalls, appears vigorous, youthful, and energetic. De Kooning is shown from a greater distance, looking shy and slightly overwhelmed.

Which is not to say that all of these "Paints a Picture" records are equally successful or that they all, their self-conscious premise not withstanding, escape seeming artificial. A 1950 double portrait of the de Koonings shows Elaine standing awkwardly between her husband and what appears to be a "Woman" at an early stage; he looks down, resting his hand unconvincingly on his palette, while she, arms tightly folded and clad in non-working attire of narrow skirt and primly collared blouse, looks past him into the middle distance. In an open-

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necked shirt, touching the emblem of his trade, Willem is clearly the artist; Elaine seems to have been turned into a wife. (Yet, in a photo where she appears to be working on a picture, Elaine is even more elegantly coiffed, earringed, and chic; *autres temps, autres moeurs*.) This artificiality may not always have been the photographer's fault. Joan Mitchell, clutching a paint-rag, looks utterly posed, albeit properly intense, despite her more convincing work clothes and the authentic-looking mess on her studio floor; in another photo from the series, she appears to be painting, but the brush she wields is perfectly clean and at right angles to the bold mark that it touches. Nell Blaine, apparently hard at work in immaculate Bermuda shorts and nifty knee socks, looks just plain peculiar. Burckhardt's images of Pollock and Krasner in the Springs barn-studio have become famous for what they reveal about how the painter set up and worked. But Burckhardt said that when he went out to the barn to take his pictures, Pollock showed him a large black-and-white painting spread on the floor. "He didn't know if it was finished," Burckhardt recalled, "and he didn't want to pour any more paint on it just for the camera and risk ruining it, but he was willing to fake it by kneeling into the picture, pretending to drip paint from a can of black enamel. The photo of this has been reproduced many times to illustrate his methods." (Hess rejected Burckhardt's photos since they didn't show the painting in various stages.)

The memorial exhibition at Tibor de Nagy made it clear that it was Burckhardt's neutral, affectionate, inquisitive eye for the significant detail—his ability to be entranced by the unsought, to find expressiveness in the apparently inconsequential—that makes his photos of New York and the places he visited or lived for extended periods of time so endlessly absorbing. "Daily life is wonderfully full of things to see," Edwin Denby once wrote, in an appreciation that dissects revealingly the amazing casualness, truthfulness, and deceptive simplicity of his friend's work. "Sometimes something happens that is better than you could ever have imagined," Burckhardt told an interviewer. "Someone stepping off a curb maybe, and then a car going by."

At Tibor de Nagy, the photos ranged from some of the photographer's earliest New York images to recent still lifes and studies of trees in Maine, including, along the way, some of his later New York pictures and one of his vivid shots of Spaccanapoli in the early 1950s, like a De Sica film condensed into a single image. All of Burckhardt's photos, no matter what their subject, demand time. Over and over again, he reminds us, as Denby noted, that "daily life is wonderfully full of things to see"—not simply "to look at," but "to see"—and that all of those things conspire to create a potent mood. Nothing is quite what it appears to be at first acquaintance. A fairly straightforward view of the wall of a fairly featureless Chelsea loft building slowly reveals its complexities, as you begin to notice that a couple of the windows that cross the print in orderly rows are half-open, while a few are banded with alarm tape. These insignificant details become overwhelmingly important, changing the scale and texture of the image, adding specificity and delicate grace notes. Burckhardt looked down into the gutter at the "million-footed" parade of pedestrians as they cross the street and photographed them from the calves down, creating a sociology of shoes, a history of New York in footwear, and, at the same time, making the shadows of those moving legs as eloquent as the legs themselves. No one else caught the scale of New York streets quite as evocatively as he did, the simultaneous and paradoxical sense of insistent rhythm and variety, of narrow enclosure and infinite space. Getting people and buildings together in the same photo, Burckhardt said, took him a long time to achieve. "Look at the size of the buildings. Now look at the size of the people," he instructed an interviewer, showing him the first photo in which he combined the two, a 1947 photo of Times Square. "The scale is

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so different." Asked how he did it, Burckhardt replied, with characteristic diffidence, "I just took the camera and pointed it in the right direction."

His Neapolitan pictures focus on people, rather than place, perhaps inevitably, given the innate theatricality of life in the old neighborhoods, especially in the years when Burckhardt was there, long before the recent "improvements" that have eviscerated the city. *Take My Picture, Napoli* (1951) presents you with an entire drama. A group of little girls in summer dresses poses happily; one of them, a nymphet with budding breasts, taller than the others, holds the baby, displaying him as a marvel, while a younger child in the foreground, hand on hip, flirts outrageously, a Loren in the making. To one side, cropped by the edge of the picture, a watchful, hostile woman—the children's mother?—glares. It's difficult to be as engaged by the Maine photos of trees, bark patterns, and undergrowth, although they do reward close attention by revealing unexpected nuances and formal relationships, probably because they seem slightly more familiar and less overwhelmingly personal than some of the other images. Yet, at Tibor de Nagy it helped to see the seamlessness of Burckhardt's efforts, no matter what his subject, through a non-chronological installation that grouped photos to underscore repeated habits of composition and structure. Sometimes continuity was provided by theme, as well, since Burckhardt photographed New York repeatedly throughout his more than half-century-long love affair with the city. His alertness to the unexpected and the revealing never slackened: witness his potent images of an uneven sidewalk and manhole cover or of a rain-slicked zebra-crossing, both made in the 1990s and as intense and surprising as any of his images from the 1940s.

"Remembering Rudy" was a charming footnote to the survey of photographs, a gathering of portraits, in many different media, made at many different times by artists ranging from celebrated friends to members of his family and encompassing everything from meticulous realism to pure metaphor. The earliest was a tiny pencil drawing, *Breakfast with Rudy Writing a Letter*, made in 1951 by the photographer's first wife, Edith Schloss, the most recent a posthumous tribute, *Untitled (The Dead Speak)*, made this year by Burckhardt and Jacquette's son, Tom. (Schloss and Burckhardt's son, Jacob, was represented by a tall, slender, elegant text-picture.) Alex Katz, Red Grooms, and Mimi Gross weighed in with affectionate images: the Katz, painted in 1980, particularly interesting because the likeness, a small study, seemed directly observed and specific, rather than having been transformed and conceptualized by the painter's usual method—in his finished paintings—of working not from life, but from other pictures. There was also Nell Blaine's assured charcoal drawing from about 1952, showing an uncharacteristically robust and solid Burckhardt; Lois Dodd's crisp, accomplished head from 1987, with its fresh touches of the brush; and Yvonne Jacquette's intimate pencil study, *Rudy Drawing*, from 1992. Avigail Schimmel's C-print, *Rudy Burckhardt, Spring '99*, was a brilliantly colored image of the photographer in his studio, as many of us last remember him—small, vivid, and quizzical.

Many of the quotes from the photographer in this article are drawn from the handsome volume *Talking Pictures: The Photography of Rudy Burckhardt* (Zoland Books, 1994). The last section begins with an interviewer's question, "Rudy, what of death?" "Some people are terrified, just terrified of dying, they'll do anything. Misery, pain, but they hold on to dear life," Burckhardt says. "I don't know. I'm not going to brag that I've got anything figured out." The wonderful legacy of Burckhardt's work suggests that he had a great deal figured out. Now, what about a full scale retrospective on this side of the Atlantic?

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Music

Seattle's new "Ring"

by Patrick J. Smith

Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle has always been a touchstone as to whether an opera company can be considered in the big leagues. For many years in this country the Metropolitan Opera was one of the very few companies presenting the cycle, and it was not until recently that other companies have begun cycles of their own. These productions have coincided with a surprising popularity of the cycle itself, with performances in whatever locale becoming worldwide sales events, with Wagnerians trekking from the shrine at Bayreuth to Paris, London, San Francisco, Adelaide, or Helsinki. Rumor is that Los Angeles, which has never produced a cycle, will join the club, coincident with Placido Domingo's taking over of the company.

The Seattle Opera Company—surprisingly—has had a large hand in this phenomenon. Long before "*Ring* Madness" set in, its General Director Glynn Ross, who adored the works, scheduled performances, raised money, and corralled audiences for them. For years he presented the cycle in Seattle (and even in Arizona when he became head of that company). Speight Jenkins succeeded Ross in Seattle, and he similarly loves the cycle. Early in his tenure, he gave the operas their second full production, which because of a severe anti-traditionalist stance was talked about in Seattle and around the country. He subsequently brought back the production, but it was evident that a fresh approach was needed. So, a year or two ago Jenkins began to raise the $10 million he said was needed to create a new *Ring* and to endow it with funds so that it could be in turn revived. This summer, the first two operas of the cycle—*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*—were given, and next summer there will be three complete cycles (of which, according to the Seattle Opera, 90 percent of the tickets have already been sold). Only two operas were given this year owing to the onerous rehearsal demands for four operas (few, if any, companies outside Bayreuth try to present all four premieres at one time). Thus, Summer 2000 became a preview of the new cycle.

The postwar history of *Ring* cycles is told, not surprisingly, in terms of the productions at Bayreuth. Wieland Wagner's "cleansing" cycle of 1951—stripping the stage of most sets and props and replacing them with an imaginative use of lighting—set the tone for other productions, nowhere as assured or inventive, over the next twenty years. Patrice Chéreau's centennial production in 1976 again rewrote *Ring* history: though reviled when first presented, it became, in its evolution over the next years, as much of a classic as the Wieland Wagner staging, and certain aspects of it have been pillaged countless times by subsequent directors. A staging such as August Everding's in Chicago in the 1990s became a Chinese menu of ideas: one from director A, one from director B.

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Chéreau was hardly the most outrageous of the stagers, despite his deviations from the norm—he had going for him a grounded theatricality and a solid sense of purpose from first to last. But later it often seemed as if those who undertook cycles had to outdo everyone else in terms of novelty and outrageousness of impact. A reaction was bound to set in—in this country if not in Germany—and the Metropolitan Opera's *Ring* of the 1980s (revived several times since) became the focus of traditionalists because of the realistic sets of Gunther Schneider-Siemssen and staid direction of Otto Schenk. The problem of that production lay not in the attitude or in the singing, but in the fact that Schenk had left immediately after staging the last opera, turning it over to a house director. Since then, whatever the merits and demerits of the singing and the glories of the Met orchestra under James Levine, the music has taken second place to the aimlessness onstage, which became a congeries of individual turns loosely strung together. To the opera buff, to whom singing is everything, this mattered as little as to the visitors who came for the orchestra and for such stage magic as the tableau at the end of *Walküre*. But the fact remained that, with all its excellences, the Met had not made the best case for a "traditional" *Ring*.

Thus Seattle. Jenkins determined from the beginning that he wanted to return to a more traditional concept of the vast work, and he found an ally in the noted American stage and opera director Stephen Wadsworth. The idea was for a "green" *Ring*, emphasizing the centrality of nature to the tale. There would be no updating for "relevance"; costumes would be a free and understated adaptation of those seen in countless photos of early productions. The Wagner menagerie, so beloved of *Ring* nuts, would be kept, with a large serpent and a good-sized frog for Alberich's transformations (and if no ewe-drawn chariot for Fricka, at least an offstage whip-crack or two). Someone who has read the libretto—and noted the stage directions created by Wagner—would not be surprised or puzzled (or outraged) by what was put onstage. But, in the event, Wadsworth did not slavishly follow the original—there was one vital departure from the norm—and was not afraid to add people when he deemed them necessary.

Wadsworth has already had a long career in opera and in the theater. His production of Handel's *Serse* ("Xerxes") for Santa Fe is justly renowned and has traveled about the country to various opera companies. He is well-known at the Seattle Opera, having directed there several times. As a theater director, he can be credited with having introduced the works of Marivaux to the American public, and this fall he will be staging the *Oresteia* in San Francisco.

Wadsworth is not a stage revolutionary in the mold of the Americans Peter Sellars, David Alden, or even Francesca Zambello, much less the German and English sappers of tradition. He tends to work from the inside out, eschewing the grand theatrical gesture or the amazing insight for quiet work with his singers, bringing out the psychological interdependencies and, through that, highlighting the events of the opera. This very absence of flashiness has led to his being less renowned than his compeers, though he ranks with them in quality.

As already noted, to an opera buff what matters is the singing. Indeed, one of the reasons that German companies rely on visual divergencies from the libretto and heavy-handed production "concepts" foreign to any idea in the composer's head is simply to take the audience's mind off the caterwauling onstage, which is often even more of a travesty than the settings and direction. Jenkins, however, is a singer's impresario, and has always insisted on the primacy of the voice in his productions in Seattle. He was instrumental in the "discovery" of the soprano Jane Eaglen, who because of her outsized bulk had never had much of an operatic career in her native England. Jenkins gave her a chance as the

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druid priestess Norma, and brought her back as Isolde. She can be said to be the linchpin of this cycle, since she will sing the Brünnhildes.

And Eaglen was not the only strong-voiced singer onstage. Stephanie Blythe—one of the Met's most underappreciated singers—made a first-rate Fricka, with a large voice, even throughout the range and with a sense of drama and movement that enlivened the stage. If Margaret Jane Wray's soprano sounded taxed by the time she arrived at her climactic *O herstes Wunder*—the realization that she is with child—as Sieglinde she displayed a lovely warm voice and appropriate range of emotions for that affecting character. Peter Kazaras's Loge, sung with pointedness and wit, took over the stage (as he should) on his appearances, while Richard Paul Fink's Alberich, thankfully not caricatured either in costume or demeanor (the costumer was Martin Pakledinaz), projected greed and evil through force of presence. The three acrobatic Rhine Maidens (Lisa Saffer, Mary Phillips, and Laura Tucker) performed near-miracles while singing and flipping head over heels. The eight Walküren were well-matched both vocally and histrionically, and their third act "Ride" was one of the highlights of the performance.

The vocal and characterizational revelation of the two operas, however, was the huge black bass voice of Stephen Milling, who wrung sympathy with his lovelorn Fasolt one night, and on the next terrorized with a dominating, feral Hunding. The voice is a cannon, and his tall, bald-headed menace was epitomized when he suddenly manhandled his wife and brutally affixed a kiss to her lips. Wadsworth used the kiss in various ways to sum up visually what had preceded: here it was at its most fearsome.

No *Ring* cycle survives vocally unscathed (though the real test is always Siegfried, who is only *en ventre sa mère* at the end of *Walküre*), and this one so far would rate one-and-a-half demerits. Mark Baker's Siegmund was properly ardent, and properly heroic, but the voice is basically limited to the louder, hectoring sounds, and his sense of springing rhythm is insecure. Phillip Joll as Wotan only filled a portion of that great and in every way demanding role. In *Rheingold* the voice sounded hollow and worn; in *Walküre* he husbanded it so that he could negotiate the lengths, but though he gave a plausible outward indication of the god's torment one never felt an inner urgency, especially in the final scene with his daughter Brünnhilde. Wadsworth staged the end so that the god, leaving the flame-filled scene, was so overcome that he collapsed against the rock face—the visual here replaced rather than reinforced what had transpired before.

Eaglen's *Walküre* Brünnhilde is perhaps the strongest of her three, and she was in particularly fine voice on August 5. She sounded rested and healthy and was able to shade her singing with expressivity. Because of her projection abilities, Eaglen can sing softly with great beauty (indeed, her soft singing is vocally the warmest) and can carry the auditorium. At full voice, she can ride any orchestra, but the sound becomes shriller and drained of color. She is obviously comfortable singing for this company, which gives her performance a security not always heard elsewhere. If her acting leaves a good deal to be desired—defiance becomes petulance and forthrightness a sort of childish eagerness—she was nonetheless fully involved in her final scene with her father, ending her plea to him to surround her with flames with such naked emotion that I felt her tears were real and not feigned, as if she had been transported by Wagner to a realm she didn't know.

Eaglen's extra-vocal performance was aided by the highly imaginative and stage-conscious sets of Thomas Lynch and by Wadsworth's direction. The "green" point of view was translated into extraordinarily detailed realistic stage pictures, which would have been the envy of the detail-mad David Belasco. Every leaf, branch, vine, and tendril seemed evident in the forest. Hunding's house grew haphazardly among the

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trees, and the beetling rock faces—striated, tufted with grass and flowers, and dominated by pines—seemed to have been brought indoors from the Washington landscape outside. Nibelheim also seemed to lurk truly underground, dimly lit and claustrophobic.

The departure from the traditional came with *Walküre*, in act one where we saw both the inside and the outside of Hunding's house (Siegmund's song to spring, therefore, could be played in the forest); and again, and more radically, at the beginning of the second act, which used the same set. Startling at curtain-rise, this idea played out quite well, for the Wotan/Fricka scene could be staged so that the two are physically separated: he outdoors and she by the family hearth of which she is the guardian. The ensuing scene of Wotan's monologue to Brünnhilde could then be played sitting down at Hunding's table. The table and Peter Kaczorowski's use of dappled forest light disguised a good deal of Eaglen's size.

Wadsworth is best known for his handling of interpersonal relationships, and this was a feature of his staging. The "big scenes"—Siegmund/Sieglinde, Wotan/Fricka, Wotan/Brünnhilde—were expertly woven into the larger fabric as well as existing on their own, and the director kept the relentless forward progress of the drama to the fore. If there was a little too much busywork in the scenes with the giants (again, not caricatures but stalwart workmen), and if the annunciation of death sequence and the subsequent Siegmund/Sieglinde scene weren't quite refined, Wadsworth may fix them next year, for the production, as with those in Bayreuth, is not fixed but evolving.

Wadsworth's individual touches, evident in his handling of character throughout, were in several places visually arresting. At the end of *Rheingold*, Fricka is the last of the gods to leave, as if she (and Loge, of course) know exactly what will happen; Wadsworth brings her back at Siegmund's death to approve of what transpired, and Loge returns at the end of *Walküre* to look with amused scorn at the distraught Wotan.

But nowhere is Wadsworth more in control than in his brilliant staging of the ride. He has individualized each Walküre, and has them in character: boisterous, cocky, arrogant, and humorous. It is certainly the best staging of that scene I have witnessed, and in its reliance on character and interrelation rather than stage gimmickry talks directly to the strengths of this traditional-but-radical "back to the future" look at the great tetralogy.

The zip and élan of the ride—and its forward motion—was seconded in the assured and winning conducting of Armin Jordan. He—thank heaven!—is not a Wagner dawdler, mooning about among the felicities. He knows when to slow down, and when to get ahead, and his orchestra produced not only energetic thrust but also varieties of color.

What is most encouraging about this "foretaste" of a complete *Ring*, however, is that everyone involved seems to be directed to the same goal (in current parlance, "on the same page"), so that even the deficiencies are rendered minor in the context of the totality. The Seattle audience was wildly enthusiastic—whether for the realism or for the qualities of the production I am unsure—but it is a safe bet that a good number of astute Wagnerians will be trekking westward rather than eastward come next summer to see how it all comes out.

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The media

The mote & the beam

by James Bowman

Without wishing to add yet another level of incestuous complexity to the subject, I cannot but notice the following lead to a story by Howard Kurtz for *The Washington Post* on-line: "The Bush-bashing may have faded for the moment, but Vice President Gore won the media skirmishing this morning by figuring out once again how to make news." Kurtz professes to think that Gore's victory was the result of an interview he gave to *The New York Times* about sex and violence in entertainment. This had news value because the vice president had hitherto been thought reluctant to criticize the entertainment industry, whose political contributions tend to go to Democrats. It was also timed to coincide with an FTC report on the "pervasive and aggressive marketing of violent movies, music, and electronic games" to those whom the industry itself considers too young for them.

In other words, the media report on Mr. Gore's success at manipulating the media as if their discovery of that manipulation were the media's own, complementary success and somehow completely unrelated to the manipulation itself. That way, I guess, everybody's happy and has something to show for his participation in the process. It is a pattern familiar from the great tabloid stories of the 1990s—Tonya Harding, O.J., Monica Lewinsky—in the reporting of which the media culture's frequent displays of self-criticism for its own prurience, obtrusiveness, or bad taste became part of the show, a demonstration that reporters had been prurient, been obtrusive, or shown bad taste virtually against their will and so deserved to retain their moral authority to continue criticizing everyone else.

It seems that a similar trick is now becoming common in political reporting. Thus, two weeks earlier, Kurtz had written that a spate of negative reports on the Bush campaign was "largely a media-manufactured story, tied to Vice President Gore's recent surge in the polls" according to what he calls "the tenets of media chaos theory," which hold that "if one candidate is doing well, the other must be, ipso facto, stumbling and bumbling." Not that this insight made the slightest difference to the coverage of the stumbling and bumbling. And it gave Mr. Kurtz an opportunity to rehearse all the reports of it to date while answering on behalf of his profession, and in characteristic fashion, conservative charges of bias: "Most journalists acknowledge that they are influenced by polls," but then so are the candidates. "Besides, they say, the story line of the last six months—George Bush comfortably ahead—had to change at some point."

Kurtz wrote of the media's behavior here as if it were determined by Newtonian laws of nature and had nothing to do with the everyday decisions of men and women like himself. Perhaps it is, too. At any rate, this assumption is what allows him to omit the detail, in the later story, that the media know they're being manipulated *and they*

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don't care. Programmed by journalistic DNA merely to get the story, reporters and editors apparently think themselves licensed by the unsophistication of their audience mostly to ignore any questions of where the story comes from or whose purposes it serves. There is a kind of conspiracy between them and the politicians they cover not to raise such questions, or to raise them only with extreme delicacy—as in the case of Mr. Gore's kissing Mrs. Gore at the Democratic convention, of which more in a moment—since questioning a man's sincerity (though not necessarily a woman's) is the worst thing you can do to him.

We know what's in this unspoken compact for the politicians, but what's in it for the journalists? I think it flatters their self-conceit as non-partisan and unengaged in the petty squabbles they are employed to report on. Seeing themselves as representatives of humanity at large and no narrow or factional interest, they have a horror of exposure as mere partisans themselves. To report critically of their own manipulation would be to join the battle rather than to stand serenely above it, and to sacrifice the pretense of political neutrality and impartiality, which is all that the profession has to justify its assumption of its own moral authority in reporting on the doings of mere "partisan" politicians.

The real success of Vice President Gore, as of his master, President Clinton, before him, has been in taking advantage of this kind of media squeamishness. The manipulation that Kurtz points to in his "Gore's success" story was noticed in *The New York Times* interview itself. The vice president's, it noted, was "a clear appeal to voters concerned about moral issues, and particularly to women with children." Such instant analysis of the strategic implications of a candidate's words or deeds (sometimes referred to as the media's "cynicism") arises out of the contemporary journalist's claim to an interpretative function, but it is also a prophylactic against any suggestion that a more penetrating and far more "cynical" analysis might be called for. Both Gore and Clinton have thus grown accustomed to daring the media to notice and comment not on their strategies—which are designed with that in mind—but on their obvious prevarications.

And of course the media rarely if ever do. I had to stop watching the vice president's much-praised acceptance speech to the Democratic convention, for example, at the point where he promised that a Gore administration would not only cure cancer but *all other diseases* as well. I couldn't take it anymore—not so much because of the patent absurdity of such a claim as because there seemed no reason to suppose that anyone would notice it or care about it. And, so far as I know, not even the conservative pundits have done so. I suppose they think that's just Al Gore's way of speaking. No doubt he is "sincere" about the wish that it should be so—just as he was about his grief at his sister's death from lung cancer or his son's accident, the appallingly tacky and exhibitionistic highlights of his speeches at the last two conventions.

This time his exhibitionism took the form of an extended, open-mouthed kiss bestowed upon his wife on the convention platform to the wild applause of the conventioneers and many of those same "women with children" he was later to try to impress with his new-found toughness towards smut peddlers and glorifiers of violence. Naturally, his shamelessness about the use of private feeling for political benefit did not go entirely unnoticed by journalists and commentators, but a presumptive sincerity once again kept any criticism to a minimum. Moreover, their dainty insertion of a toe into the water of "cynicism" provided journalists and media reporters like Howard Kurtz with an always-welcome opportunity for some more self-criticism, since *vox pop.* was confidently said to have liked the kiss, unlike those nasty old cynical old journalists.

> "The kiss sealed the deal," for voter Jim Russell of Webster Groves, Mo., *The Boston Globe*

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reported. "That long kiss Vice President Al Gore gave to his wife, Tipper, as he came to the stage Thursday night, that silent declaration of difference from President Clinton, said 'I'm my own man' for Russell more than any words Gore spoke, though Russell was impressed by those as well." One of several newspapers that organized focus groups to discover what real voters thought of the Democratic convention, the *Globe* quoted Russell, a mental health counselor, as saying: "You couldn't fake that kiss. You would have been able to see through it if President and Hillary Clinton had done it. But Gore seems like he really loves his wife, and she loves him. That long kiss, against the backdrop of the hideous things Clinton did, for me, it's important that the president sets that tone, as a family man." The result: Russell says he has switched from George W. to Lover Boy Al.

Here is a good example of how inadequate "sincerity" is as a measure of political rectitude. It is just *because* Mr. Gore sincerely loves his wife that a self-congratulatory display of his uxoriousness is so deplorable. It hasn't even got the excuse of honest hypocrisy.

Noting all the media "buzz" of questions about the kiss, which Gore insisted was "completely spontaneous," Kurtz sees the conversion of Mr. Russell, the mental health counselor, as "just another example of the gap between the public and the press" —which, we gather, is meant to be to the discredit of the press. Encouraged by such an enthusiastic public response, at least from those in the mental health community, Mr. Gore later appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show to press home his advantage by casting some more animadversions in the way of those who market violent video games to children and once again to insist that the kiss was completely unpremeditated and without any calculation of its likely effect on voters—just like, presumably, his appearance on Oprah's show to talk about it. It was hard to see in this case how not to question either his sincerity or his own mental health.

Occasionally in the past, it's true, we have found it possible even for this new media darling to go too far, as when he claimed in an interview with CNN last year that "I took the initiative in creating the Internet." At the time, and on a few other occasions like it—such as when he claimed to have discovered the pollution in Love Canal or that he and Tipper had been the models for the characters in Erich Segal's *Love Story*—even the most soberly acquiescent of journalists could scarcely suppress a titter. But when the "Internet" comment reappeared in a Bush campaign ad, it was widely reported as an example of "negative campaigning" that had turned the race "really nasty" after Bush had implicitly promised to show exemplary civility and not be "ugly and mean" or "downgrade people." Media memories are short. After every election it is promptly forgotten that all candidates make such promises, and that all candidates break them.

In any case, you would think that the vice president's Münchhausian tendencies—surely a worrying trait in a man who aspires to place his finger on that far-famed nuclear button—would be acknowledged as a matter of legitimate public concern. Yet to give the press its due, it is consistent in treating these tendencies instead as a kind of verbal tic. George W. Bush's frequent lapses of grammatical sequence and failures of metaphorical good-housekeeping, as when he pointed out the difficulty some people have in putting food on their families, may not be as ominous as Gore's self-aggrandizing fantasies, but they are equally forgivable on the grounds of sincerity, which such lapses may in fact be taken to demonstrate. Thus he escapes most of the censure that, in other English-speaking countries, would long since have made him a laughingstock.

Stupidity may have been The Story about Dan Quayle (I think unjustifiably so) but it is not, at least not yet, The Story about either Bush or Gore. It would be implausible with both candidates winning

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over 40 percent support in the polls. It would also be innovative (and perhaps a little bit frightening) in a presidential candidate, and it would probably deprive the media of the more familiar pleasure of lying in ambush for the first examples of "mean-spiritedness" and "negativity" to amble down the campaign highway. Add to this the joy with which they fall to the task of butchering a "gaffe" or two and you have the story which quickly superseded that of the "Internet" ad in the week after Labor Day when Governor Bush was overheard on an unexpectedly live microphone expressing a private opinion of a *New York Times* reporter with a word that neither politicians nor television networks nor any newspaper with a general circulation would customarily use in public.

As a specialty publication with a circulation mainly limited to grown-ups, *The New Criterion* will not scruple to print the word "asshole," if only to avoid the ecstasies of self-righteousness occasioned by Mr. Bush's use of it among those who (we now learn with some surprise) pique themselves upon their verbal decorum—and, presumably, their personal forbearance towards political enemies, if they had any. Maureen Dowd, for example, her chivalrous instincts aroused, took up the cudgels on behalf of the offended reporter and her fellow *Times* hack, Adam Clymer, by calling Mr Bush's epithet a "puerile display of male bonding with 'Big Time' Dick Cheney."

> The Bushes have a fractious relationship with reporters [she wrote] because they have a bedrock belief in their own goodness. So they get deeply offended when reporters challenge their deeds, rather than simply accepting them as nice, decent people bred to rule. That's why they failed to fathom press criticism of Mr. Cheney for his nihilistic voting record on apartheid and Head Start. W's baptism into Washington politics in '88 was not based in policy; it was to make sure the Bush campaign was responsive to those who had been, in Junior's favorite phrase, "loyal to all Bushes." Dick Cheney was loyal to all Bushes. That was the only litmus test that mattered to them. Journalists are not in a position to be loyal to all Bushes.

Of course they're not. But maybe an even better explanation for the Bushes' "fractious relationship with reporters" is that so many of the latter, like Miss Dowd, continually sneer at them for their social origins, or attribute to them "a bedrock belief in their own goodness," without a moment's thought for their own aristocratic airs and mountainous moral self-satisfaction (just look at a certain person's use of the word "nihilistic" in the passage above) than which none is more Himalayan in scale than the journalist's. Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Well, that's journalism for you. Self-righteousness just sort of goes with the territory. Miss Dowd seemed to think the comment a poor reflection on Mr. Bush's manners—though not on those of the many of her profession who found themselves eavesdropping on a private conversation and blabbing its contents to the neighborhood. Perhaps she thought, as most journalists appear to think, that politicians should not be allowed to have private opinions, or that the only distinction between the public and private spheres of what used to be called public life is that the latter have not yet been completely penetrated by some enterprising reporter on the hunt for juicy bits.

It doesn't work the other way, however. Miss Dowd reports that "W. was angry at Adam Clymer for an article in April reporting on Texas's abysmal health care record, and for a piece last week that rated the accuracy of a new Republican ad on prescription drugs 'zero' on its central claim," but Mr. Clymer himself, writing with typical journalistic bumptiousness in the *Times*'s "Week in Review" section a few days later, mentioned another reason why Governor Bush might have consigned him to the nether regions.

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> About 18 months ago, I was editing an article describing how hard Mr. Bush was working to study national issues. With feeble gallows humor, I suggested that perhaps he needed the tutorials more than others. But while my comparable slurs of President Clinton, to cite one prominent example, stayed private, a spectacular typesetting blunder got my wisecrack printed. Through an Editors' Note, The Times apologized, sort of.

Clymer, in his *Times* piece, is not unaware of the irony of his having been caught himself, as it were by an "open mike," while expressing a merely private opinion—but not so aware that he could not also claim to think, on the CNN "Reliable Sources" program, that using such an epithet about his good self contradicted Bush's stated desire to "restore honor and dignity to the White House." In the same way, Bryant Gumbel of "The Early Show" on CBS noted that "Bush may have taken yet another step backwards by sticking his foot in his mouth with a vulgar comment," though he himself had been caught on camera mouthing the words "What a f***ing idiot" about a guest on the show from the conservative Family Research Council who had defended the Boy Scouts' exclusion of homosexual leaders.

Even without such evidence as this, few people can imagine that these journalists are really shocked by a politician's use of an anatomical epithet to express disgust. They are simply playing their assigned positions in the game of politics as we now play it. The rules of the game in this as in so many other cases implicitly acknowledge the media as players in the game, manipulating and being manipulated, either throwing up their hands in horror at the use of a bad word they routinely use themselves or sagely explaining as if to an audience of fools this or that bit of strategy which has been crafted precisely in order to *be* so explained. But the number one rule is that no one must ever notice, as Bush did in identifying Clymer as an asshole, that the media are on the field. Violate *that* rule and you will find, at last, the "outrage" that Bob Dole noticed was missing four years ago, and that has been so conspicuously absent ever since.

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Books

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde

by Jenny Teichman

Dr. Jekyll would not be famous were it not for his connection with Mr. Hyde. Perhaps one reason that Peter Singer's name is well known, both to students of philosophy and to lay people, is that he is a Jekyll-and-Hyde kind of person.

As Dr. Jekyll, Singer is a leading figure in the campaign against cruelty to animals. *Qua* Mr. Hyde, he insists that there is nothing wrong with killing human infants if they are either (a) severely deformed or brain-damaged or (b) simply not wanted by parents or adopters.

As Dr. Jekyll, Singer deplores the despoliation of Planet Earth. *Qua* Mr. Hyde, he has no wish to condemn governments that control their human populations by encouraging abortion and infanticide.

As Dr. Jekyll, Singer discovered that he would rather spend money on nursing care for his aged mother, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, than on the various left-wing or pro-animal projects demanded by his utilitarian philosophy. *Qua* Mr. Hyde, he continues to tell physicians, and conferences, that the low quality of life of senile patients and patients in coma means that it is okay to allow them to die and even to take positive steps to destroy them. Peter Singer, speaking as Hyde, said, in my hearing, in December 1999, that the organs of people in persistent coma should be harvested for transplants and research. He believes that coma patients are already dead in a sense, hence the re-use of their organs is ethically required on utilitarian principles.

One of Singer's latest publications is a slim volume called *A Darwinian Left*.[1] In it he says that "the genuine left" is always on the side of the weak and the poor against the rich and the mighty. Plainly Dr. Jekyll is speaking here, but let's not forget that Mr. Hyde opposes old-fashioned right-wing folk (Christians for example) who try to protect human fetuses and unwanted human infants from destruction. Before the Catholic Church was thrown out of Communist China, its nuns saved the lives of very weak people, namely, infants targeted by the centuries-old Chinese addiction to female infanticide. Mr. Hyde, though, is contemptuous of religious ways of thinking and defends infanticide anyway—just as long as no adult feelings get hurt by it.

But let us return to the little book about Darwinism.

As a utilitarian, says Singer, he has to condemn the economic arrangements which mean that the 400 richest men in the United States own just as much between them as 45 percent of the poorest people in the rest of the world. And I think lots of other people, including lots of non-utilitarians, feel exactly the same way.

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1 *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*, by Peter Singer; Yale University Press, 64 pages, $9.95.

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Singer believes that Darwinism has been taken over by the right and as a result has been rejected by the left. According to the right-wing view, Darwin proved that mankind is subject to the rule of the survival of the fittest and from that it was deduced that a perpetual increase in the wealth and power of the top beneficiaries of capitalism cannot be avoided because it follows an ineluctable law of nature. Singer claims that Darwin's work can be interpreted in a different way. Left-wing Darwinism accepts the theory of evolution, of course, but also allows that men are somewhat more malleable than the other animals. Unlike Marxists, however, "genuine" left-wingers do not say that human beings can be made to give up self-interest or conform to a completely egalitarian way of living.

Singer argues that the limits of human malleability can be observed by observing different social groups. Human societies vary a great deal in respect of some features—e.g., in the way food is prepared. In respect of other features they vary a little but not a lot; Singer suggests this is true of sexual arrangements and also of xenophobia and feelings of ethnicity. He notes, thirdly, that societies vary hardly at all in respect to the presence of hierarchy.

A "genuine" left-wing program would not try to alter what seems to be invariable, but that doesn't mean hierarchies have to be brutal or greedy; they don't have to be based on guns and avarice. The left has no need to attempt the impossible task of abolishing self-interest; instead it should point out the obvious, namely, that great wealth and happiness don't necessarily go together and that happiness is better than wealth. Human nature is capable of cooperation as well as competition. The well-known "tit-for-tat" solution to the problem of the Prisoner's Dilemma shows that cooperation is rational until proved otherwise. Human nature is also capable of altruism, as is shown by the British willingness to donate blood freely and anonymously for the benefit of complete strangers. These commonsensical suppositions about the human race induce Singer to believe in the possibility of "tailoring our institutions to human nature" in a left-wing kind of way.

I do not know whether Singer's interpretation of Darwinism would have been recognized by Darwin himself. I suspect it might be rejected by philosophical critics of Darwinism such as Mary Midgley and David Stove.

Another recent piece by Singer appears in a book called *Singer and his Critics*,[2] edited by Dale Jamieson. To some readers, the word "Critics" might suggest the possibility of philosophical confrontations between the subject and the commentators; if so, those readers will be disappointed.

Schopenhauer once accused the followers of Hegel of celebrating the works of their master "with corybantic shouting." Most of the commentators in this book are more decorous than that. However, Roger Crisp, of Oxford, displays a touch of the corybant when he writes: "[Singer] has done an incalculable amount of good." And Dale Jamieson—a pint-sized Adonis with iron-gray lovelocks—whirls himself happily into the dance: "Singer is one of the most influential philosophers of this century . . . none has changed more lives."

Books or series with titles like *So-and-so and his Critics* or *The Library of Living Philosophers* are really Festschriften. Each volume is a collection the aim of which is to praise someone's life work. That is why the "criticisms" included are never seriously hostile; indeed they are sometimes quite groveling. One can see why this must be so; after all, you don't celebrate a life work by trying to demolish it. And, secondly, since the subject of a Festschrift is usually still alive, his cooperation might be needed and might be sought. It would be ridiculous to invite people who throw philosophical stink-bombs at big names to contribute to celebratory books.

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2 *Singer and His Critics*, edited by Dale Jamieson; Blackwell Publishing, 300 pages, $27.95 paper.

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Dale Jamieson has followed the usual pattern. There are thirteen contributors, the best known being Richard Hare, who, as some readers will remember, stood by Singer when protestors, including several people in wheelchairs, closed down conferences in Germany and Austria because of their dislike of Mr. Hyde's support for euthanasia. Singer's fellow-Australians are well-represented. Some contributors refer to him as "Peter." I would guess that many or most of the authors chosen were nominated by the subject himself, for this, as I've hinted, is not an unknown way of compiling a Festschrift.

Jamieson praises Singer for refusing to concentrate on dreary meta-ethical topics like the is/ought question and for choosing, instead, to do what he can to change the world. Other authors offer similar praise while failing nevertheless to follow Singer's example. For the most part they stick firmly to the meta-ethical questions which Singer allegedly despises. That means that he himself has to devote much of his "Reply" to those questions. Topics include various tiny differences in the interpretation of utility and utilitarianism and minute verbal squabbles about the meaning(s) of words such as "cognitivism," "non-cognitivism," "intrinsic," "extrinsic," etc. One paper homes in on a very old chestnut, namely the question: How do we know anyone else (or any animal) is in pain? Others discuss matters of moral psychology, e.g., the roles therein of compassion, partiality, distance, altruism, and so on.

The most notable feature of the collection, a feature which follows from its very nature as a Festschrift, is the fact that it ignores Mr. Hyde almost completely. There is virtually no discussion of the theory that it is not wrong to kill infants if no one wants them. There is virtually no discussion of the view that it is okay to kill people in coma and people with Alzheimer's disease. There is no discussion of the rightness or wrongness of using coma victims and aborted infants as a source of organs for transplanting into other people. Only one contributor, F. N. Kamm, was brave enough to mention Mr. Hyde at all. Unfortunately her paper, though not at all bad, is very long and somewhat indigestible. It lacks punch because it covers too many diverse issues.

One of Dr. Jekyll's roles in life is to gloss the sayings of Mr. Hyde. Thus he often pretends that the proposition about the rightness of killing unwanted infants really only has to do with infants who are severely deformed and suffering terribly. But that just isn't true. The philosophical premises from which Singer derives his justification of infanticide are not confined to the deformed and the suffering. They consist in the theses that infants are not persons and that only persons have significant moral status and a serious right to life.

Has Dr. Jekyll really changed the way people live? I think he has changed eating habits, though the change—to vegetarianism—is often only temporary, at least according to my observation. What about Mr. Hyde's teachings on euthanasia and infanticide? Here the picture is rather murky. Many people in the West now regard voluntary and some kinds of non-voluntary euthanasia as acceptable practices. But I do not think Peter Singer can claim all the credit for this state of affairs. Some credit, or discredit, is owed to Jack Kervorkian and to Derek Humphries (of the pressure group Exit) and to utilitarian philosophy teachers such as Michael Tooley and Jonathan Glover and Richard Hare and Mary Warnock. And when governments legalize euthanasia that too affects popular perceptions of the practice.

On December 30, 1999, Singer stated in public, in Hong Kong, that the Dutch government's decision to make euthanasia lawful in certain circumstances has not been followed by an increase in the number of medical killings carried out. He said that he and his colleagues have been monitoring the situation "since about 1986." Yet the findings of other monitors are quite different from Singer's. Two surveys carried

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out in Holland by P. J. van de Maas indicate that there were 2700 cases of voluntary euthanasia in 1990 and 3600 cases in 1995, an increase of one-third. His findings are reported by John Keown and Henk Jochemsen in *The Journal of Medical Ethics* (February, 1999).

Who is right? There is a mystery here. Was Dr. Jekyll innocently mistaken? Or was Mr. Hyde telling fibs? But why should Mr. Hyde tell lies about what happens in Holland? Singer, after all, is an advocate of euthanasia and infanticide; instead of going into denial, he ought to welcome increases in the frequency of those practices. Perhaps we should remember, here, that if punishing or not punishing a procedure or practice makes no difference at all to its incidence there'd be no need to have laws and policemen.

As far as I know Singer has never been officially invited to give advice about the proper treatment of animals. Dr. Jekyll has not officially advised farmers or zoo keepers or animal hospitals or governments. But as the director and founder of the Monash Centre for Bio-Ethics, Mr. Hyde receives *official* recognition as an ethical expert and consequently has been invited to advise doctors on matters of life and death, especially death.

In brief: as Dr. Jekyll, Singer's influence on vegetarianism and related matters, though widespread, has been unofficial and (I believe) often temporary. As Mr. Hyde, he has been officially endorsed in Australia and at Princeton, as an ethical expert, an ethical advisor, and I suspect that in this case the influence has been more permanent. It is perhaps not a coincidence that one of the world's first programs for legal euthanasia was put into effect in one of the states in Singer's native country. Fortunately for the aged aboriginal inhabitants of the Northern Territory, the legislation was struck down when federal politicians decided it was contrary to Australia's undertaking to adhere to the Charter of the United Nations and its Declaration on Human Rights.

Orpheus in Hell

Michael H. Kater Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits. Oxford University Press, 399 pages, $35

reviewed by Alexander Coleman

Today, the exhortative power of music for political ends is a forgotten topic. But as anyone who was alive during World War II in the United States remembers, things were different then. This brand of musical motivation was all around us. Now, hurtling as we are into the new millennium, we are as far from the stirring "God Bless America" as sung by Kate Smith as we are from Marc Blitzstein's *Airborne Symphony*, Randall Thompson's *Testament of Freedom*, Earl Robinson's *Ballad for Americans*—even Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, though the latter work still appears on musical programs around the Fourth of July. During the war, there was a commonality that permeated all echelons of society, and the music that emanated from that collective sense of purpose came in all sorts of guises, from the above-mentioned musical artifacts to War Bond rallies to broadcasts by Toscanini, Glenn Miller, and Woody Guthrie.

There was no cultural commissar in Washington or grand propaganda machine that orchestrated this effort, though there were a few American aspirants to the role of boosterish exhorter, at least in the realm of literature. Edmund Wilson, in his essay "Archibald MacLeish and the Word" (collected in *Classics and Commercials*), noted in 1940 that MacLeish, then in his role as Librarian of Congress, descended to the level of asking writers that they lay off pessimism and nay-saying for the duration. Optimism was the order of the day. In an address given to the American Association for Adult Education more than a year before Pearl Harbor, MacLeish insinuated that "perhaps the luxury of complete confession, the uttermost despair, the farthest doubt, should be denied themselves by writers living in any but the most orderly and

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settled times." (Question to MacLeish: exactly *when* are times orderly and settled?) Wilson's response to this fantastic request by the Librarian of Congress was both stupefied and succinct: "It is hard to see how any person to whom literature was even for a moment real could have written the sentence I have quoted." If we extend, in an imaginative flight, the purview of MacLeish's diktat to classical music, one trembles at the thought of an infinite series of bright, heroic allegros and sundry other celebrations of future sunny morns that might have been scribbled out by American composers who found themselves earnestly fulfilling MacLeish's injunction.

Art and politics don't mix. But the point is that MacLeish was just dispensing bromides. He was not suggesting sinister political moves against those he thought of as miscreants in art: the irresponsible and nihilistic novelists who were not "with the program." Things were decidedly different in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s. Hitler handed over to Joseph Goebbels the activities of censor and cultural commissar in 1933, creating the Reich Culture Chamber (RKK), which rigorously supervised all aspects of cultural life—radio, theater, film, creative writing, the press, and music. Although the outlines of the manipulation of musical life in Hitler's Germany, as brought about by the subsection of the RKK called the Reich Music Chamber (RMK), are well known, until this decade no scholar has had the energy and equanimity to deal with such a monstrous topic in all its ramifications, and to try to ask and answer a few simple questions. What did the Nazis want from music? What were their aims, aside from the most obvious elimination of Jewish "music and musicians"? How is it that so many musicians fell under their spell?

The aims of the Nazis were evident from the start. German culture had gone astray, and they were going to put things right by means of a purgative, purifying process. In music, this meant idealizing consonant tonality and driving out all elements not traditionally "German" in their view—the anathemata were serial, "dodecaphonic" music; Jewish music and musicians; gypsy music; and jazz in all its forms.

It is a good moment for an appraisal of this subject, so fraught with snares on all sides, because Oxford University Press has just published Michael Kater's *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits*, which discusses the political difficulties and evasions of Werner Egk, Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Karl Amadeus Hartmann, Carl Orff, Hans Pfitzner, Arnold Schoenberg, and Richard Strauss. This is the final volume of a trilogy, which Kater, who teaches at the Center for German and European Studies at York University, Toronto, began in 1992 with *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany*. His second volume, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (1997), concentrated on conductors and instrumentalists. These books are to be commended for their energetic scholarship and the measured tone of critical prudence and judiciousness. It could not have been easy.

As Kater suggests, music has always played a preponderant role in German culture. "Certainly until 1945," he writes, "the Germans as a people, not only in the Hitlerian *Völkisch* sense, defined themselves and their history decisively through *Kultur*—they said they always had it, and nobody else did." German music was Kultur, and vice versa. Concomitantly, the only good music was German music. "[I]n their collective view, this is what set them apart from materialistic British money-bags, degenerate French hedonists, insensitive American pragmatists, work-shirking Italian fools, and the alcoholized denizens of a half-Asiatic Russian Empire."

Music was marshalled for the political cause with far more depth and intensity than that imposed upon the other arts. The German composer most prized by the Nazis was Richard Wagner, with his heady admixture of art and politics. Musical nationalism is evident to any listener to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, while German racial super-

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iority is vaunted throughout his critical writings, above all in his "What is German?," "My Life," and "Judaism and Music." There is no question, Kater observes,

> that Hitler, continuing his rise to power in the mid-to-late 1920's, considered himself Wagner's direct successor, a man of genius and a hero who would save the German people, who in turn were defined and united by a purity of blood. . . . To Hitler, Richard Wagner was prophet, archetypal German polymath, and artist as well as political leader.

Finally, "National Socialism was anchored in the works of Wagner." Hitler dixit.

As for the fate of any ordinary German musician, Jewish or not, trying to make a living in this maelstrom, the statistics are daunting. By 1933, there were over ninety-thousand active musicians working or trying to find work in Germany. Fewer than half of these artists were devoted to the so-called classics, or serious music. As for musical venues, Berlin had three opera houses, forty theaters, twenty cabarets, and several concert halls. There were locales for variety revues, the most famous being the Scala, capable of seating three-thousand customers for each show. Hamburg and Munich were close runners-up in musical activity. But because of the 1929 crash, musicians had been cast out into the streets in droves. By 1933 even some members of the well-endowed Berlin Philharmonic had suffered salary cuts of 40 percent. Jewish musicians of the highest caliber were gradually decertified in increasing numbers during the thirties as unacceptable by the RMK. To make the dreadful story as short as possible, a German musicologist in the early 1980s estimated that, of the above-numbered working musicians in 1933 Germany, a mere 465 musicians were able to emigrate to the United States during the Hitler period—most of them Jews.

Within the Nazi imagination the enemies of German *Seele* ("soul") in music were various and legion, and they had to be dealt with energetically. One might start, as did Professor Kater in his first volume, with the most un-German of all manifestations of modernism—jazz. Simply put, to the Nazis, jazz was detrimental to the future of German music, and it had to be rooted out of German musical life. The younger generation of German "classical" composers influenced by jazz—Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Ernst Krenek—were thus automatically beyond the pale. But jazz had been a godsend to German modernists of all genres. It was going to rejuvenate classical music, which had lately gone stale. It was the "music of this decade" and the "incarnation of American vitalism." It was non-hierarchical, a musical emancipation from stodginess—a "school of democracy for Germans." The Bauhaus had its own student jazz band. George Grosz and Paul Klee adored jazz. Hindemith's teacher, Dr. Bernhard Sekles, instituted a jazz course at the Frankfurt Conservatory in early 1928, teaching rhythm, improvisation, and ensemble playing.

But for the followers of the National Socialist movement, jazz was a doubly nefarious genre, since its practitioners constituted, in the words of Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi's chief ideologue, a "Jewish-Negro plot against German culture." In a startling scholarly find, Kater carefully describes the poster for the infamous "Degenerate Music" exhibit in Dusseldorf in 1937, "featuring a monkeylike Negro, decorated with the Star of David, tooting on a saxophone." (It is worth noting that, according to Kater, the Marxist philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, later a scourge of all things authoritarian, in the 1930s "enthused over the prospect of the Nazi authorities forbidding [jazz] altogether.") Jazz got all the blame—serialism, atonality, and (Hindemith's) New Objectivity were the fault of the all-pervasive jazz culture. Josephine Baker, Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, *The Blue Angel* with music by the immensely popular Weintraub Syncopators (soon wisely to exile themselves from Germany with their pianist Franz Waxman, later of Hollywood fame), all brought on

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fits of Goebbel's wrath. The Nazis had the idea that a jazz player or fan was unreliable. As one storm trooper exclaimed after the failed attempt on Hitler's life, "Anything that starts with Ellington ends with an assassination attempt on the Führer!"

As early as 1932, the Von Papen regime had banned the employment of any "colored" musician, and the decree was enforced. When, in January 1935, the American black tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins was scheduled to tour Germany with the English "sweet" dance band led by Jack Hylton, the regime forbade his presence in German dance halls. Hawkins was marooned in Holland for the duration of the band's tour in Germany, and so we have Von Papen and Goebbels to thank for the splendid recordings he made with the innocuous Dutch band called "The Ramblers Dance Orchestra." As for the numerous Jewish musicians within and without Germany in the realm of "light music," the restrictions were ever more stringent, but with a few amusing slips. Benny Goodman, "jazz musician, director of a jazz band in London," was of course listed in a February 1937 list of forbidden Jewish musicians, but his erstwhile competitor on the jazz clarinet, Artie Shaw (born Arthur Arshawsky), was not because "the Nazis believed him to be the son of 'former Irish music critic' George Bernard Shaw!" Connections always helped, some muddled through, but there was the constant threat of dismissal or worse—a knock on the door. It is only fair to note that Richard Strauss, otherwise serene in his Garmisch redoubt, was eased out of the RMK presidency in 1935 because he would not decertify or dismiss any Jewish musician.

The Twisted Muse, Kater's second volume, trod on more familiar ground, but here too he presented an abundance of fresh material. Particularly depressing is the spectacle of a whole raft of mediocre composers given inordinate attention all because of their political reliability. Has anyone today ever heard a note of music by Paul Graener or Max Trapp? They were the white hope of German music, while all music related to the so-called "Second Viennese School" (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern) was utterly *verboten*, yet another aspect of the sinister plot to destroy Holy German Music. And there is the spectacle of the constant jockeying for Der Führer's attention on the part of such otherwise distinguished conductors as Wilhelm Furtwängler, Clemens Krauss, and Hans Knappertsbusch. Professor Kater also explores the figure of Herbert von Karajan with not especially pleasant results. Richard Osborne, the author of a recent biography of Karajan, has severely criticized the accuracy of Kater's portrait of the conductor. Still, one senses that Kater has given us cool, not at all vengeful, treatments of the likes of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Karl Böhm, Hans Rosbaud, and the pianists Wilhelm Backhaus, Edwin Fischer, Wilhelm Kempff, and Walter Gieseking. There are innumerable other, major and minor, figures.

There are terrible things to be seen in these pages—the spectacle of Anton Webern reading *Mein Kampf* as late as 1940, finding it "exhilarating," and following "every German victory on the Western front with great enthusiasm." After all, Webern was a composer denigrated mercilessly by the Nazis as "degenerate." Equally absurd and depressing is the spectacle of Lorenzo da Ponte's role as librettist for Mozart's operas being expunged from the musical scores published in the Reich, or the rewriting of Handel's superb oratorio *Judas Maccabeus* to rid it of "Biblical, Jewish" trappings and sending it back into the Nazi concert halls under the title *Commander*! And what to make of Carl Orff knowingly composing a score to supplant the incomparable incidental music composed by Felix Mendelssohn for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Orff's pounding, heavily rhythmic music, as exemplified in his big "hit" of 1937, *Carmina Burana*, was precisely the kind of music the Nazis wanted.

Of particular interest in *The Twisted Muse* is the fourth chapter, "Music in the Institutions." This has to do with the decline of

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Hausmusik, the emphasis on archaic impulses and new uses for the recorder, the guitar, and joy-in-nature choral singing fostered by the Hitler Youth (obligatory for all youths between ten and eighteen by 1939). The aim was twofold: to utilize music, with its ideological and character-building potential, in order to raise better leaders—a kind of perverted *paideia*—and to infiltrate the existing musical establishment and turn them into political singing groups. "With one fell swoop, [such renowned choirs as] the Thomaner-Chor of Leipzig, the Dresdner Kreuzchor, the Wiener Sängerknaben, and the Regensburger Domspatzen were collectively taken over by Hitler Youth, without so much as being asked." By 1944, there were some nine-hundred Hitler Youth musical aggregations.

On a final note of musical sacrilege, the organist at Bach's church in Leipzig, Günther Ramin, who is now remembered as the mentor of Karl Richter, the famed director of the Munich Bach Choir, took part in many Nazi celebrations, not the least of which was as organist at the Nuremberg rally of 1936. He played on a modest instrument of 16,000 pipes, 220 registers, and five manuals, all amplified by giant loudspeakers—Albert Speer's empty architectural bombast in the form of a "musical" instrument.

Composers of the Nazi Era is, in many ways, a summa of the problems that have obsessed Kater for the past decade. Although he touches on many issues already discussed, he also offers many new insights and scholarly discoveries. For instance, it is a matter of record that Richard Strauss signed a defamation against Thomas Mann, on the basis of Mann's pondered consideration of the work of Wagner, which became the lecture "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," delivered in Munich in 1933 and subsequently in Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris. In many ways, this work was Mann's adieu to Germany—he emigrated, first to Switzerland, then to the United States, shortly afterwards. The screed against Mann was probably authored by the arch-nationalist conductor Hans Knappertsbusch, an old hand at Munich intrigues, and Strauss has always been severely criticized for joining in the anti-Mann fray. But here we have Professor Kater, who, in his researches in the Strauss archive in Garmisch, has come up with documentation, "which I have found only recently," suggesting that Strauss had not read Mann's text, and that he foolishly signed the protest less for ideological than for personal reasons; he had always harbored a visceral dislike of Mann, considering him "a boring patrician." There is evidence of a possible retraction, but it was too late. The long story told by Kater shows the results of such diligence. Needless to say, the matter is still hardly flattering to Strauss.

Kater also gives us a portrait of Paul Hindemith, "The Reluctant Emigré," which contrasts notably with that given us by the composer's colleague at Yale during the war years, Luther Noss, who in *Paul Hindemith in the United States* (1989) painted a placid picture of the exiled German composer, energetic teacher, and reformer, content and productive in New Haven until his sudden resignation from Yale in 1948. Kater has a completely different take on Hindemith, his relationship to German *Kultur*, and the decision to leave Yale so suddenly. Kater senses a musical mind indelibly bound to Germany and its culture, a participant in the RMK under Richard Strauss, who in turn admired the younger upstart for his wide-ranging knowledge, all-round musicianship, and incredible proficiency on the major instruments of the orchestra, but who didn't care for the younger man's music. It turns out that Hindemith was reluctant in the extreme to emigrate, and did so only after no other possibilities were open to him, well after Furtwängler had defended him and even Strauss had offered to take the libretto of Hindemith's opera *Mathis der Maler* to Goebbels, to show the opera's suitability for the aims of the new regime. Kater does not even think of Hindemith as an émigré, though geographically he most certainly was one.

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Kater's conclusions are implicit: "One and all—musicians and singers, composers and conductors, all of whom had to make a living as artists in the Third Reich—emerged in May 1945 severely tainted, with their professional ethos violated and their music often compromised: gray people against a landscape of gray." Although Kater implies no ur-cause to so much immorality in the realm of music, it seems to lie evident throughout all three volumes—the chauvinistic, increasingly narrow definitions of "what is German" converted into a paranoiac, exclusionary musical myopia, which in turn was enforced by sanctioned governmental violence. All this stems from insane hauteur and hubris on the matter of music and Germany. As Wagner once said: "the German has the exclusive right to be called 'musician.'" Oh?

In his last chapter, "Composers in the Postwar Era," Kater treats us to a searing critique of the "denazification" proceedings as they were to apply to particular composers from among the eight under consideration, where outright fabrications, lies, and guile ruled the defense case in each particular proceeding. The self-portraiture by Carl Orff and Werner Egk as resistance fighters against the Nazis is particularly galling. Not surprisingly, given the rush to "get things over with" impelled by the new threat from the Soviet Union, the ineptness of the prosecutions only compounded the whitewash, and so it is understandable, even inevitable, that all concerned got off light and easy, no problem.

Today Archibald MacLeish's exhortation to writers of the Thirties seems quaintly innocent, no matter how foolish. But, the diktats emanating from the German Propaganda Ministry regarding music are obviously retrogressive commands to go back in time to the primitive bark and shout. At its worst, they wanted a version in sound of what Jorge Luis Borges called "the game of energetic barbarism." Michael Kater has given us a careful prose description of this sinister musical atavism.

The maiden phoenix

Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller & Mary Beth Rose, editors
Elizabeth I: Collected Works.
The University of Chicago Press,
436 pages, $40

reviewed by Paul Dean

In the last scene of *Henry VIII*, by Shakespeare and Fletcher, the baby princess Elizabeth is brought onstage for her baptism by Archbishop Cranmer. He prophecies the glories of her exemplary reign: under her benign sway, truth and peace shall flourish, and at her death, "as when/ The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix," there shall arise from her ashes an equally great successor. When *Henry VIII* was first staged, in 1613, that successor, James I, could have the satisfaction of knowing how right Cranmer was. The baby, of course, says nothing. Without a similar gift of reserve, it is doubtful whether the historical Elizabeth would have survived to inherit the throne.

No one in their senses would have put Elizabeth onstage in her lifetime, but only two years after her death she had been portrayed in Thomas Heywood's two-part play *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*. This is an uncomplicated celebration of her triumphs, colored by the nostalgia for her reign that was widespread in the early Jacobean period. Elizabeth might have approved of Heywood's play; it was propaganda, and nobody had been a more gifted manipulator of the Elizabethan mythology than the queen herself. A brilliant political tactician, she had participated in the creation of a royal iconography complete with quasi-liturgical rites and ceremonies. Gloriana, Cynthia, the Fairy Queen, a host of aliases hid an identity that, perhaps, remained unknown even to her. The letters, poems, prayers, and speeches edited in this volume are best taken as contributions towards the maintenance of that mystery.

We should not underestimate the enigmatic character of Elizabeth, or the poten-

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tial for psychological damage in her background. Her father had ordered the execution of her mother, and her sister had had her imprisoned; such experiences do not foster a capacity for trust or emotional impulsiveness. Elizabeth had neither. Her only known letter to Henry, written when she was twelve, is, unsurprisingly, formal, correct, and frigid. Her letters to Edward VI and to Lord Seymour, the protector, vigorously rebut charges of treason and protest her loyalty to the crown. Her adroitness is summed up in the couplet she is said to have scratched onto a window during her imprisonment: "Much suspected by [i.e., of] me,/ Nothing proved can be."

Elizabeth had also had to equivocate about her religious beliefs in order to survive the Reformation. At her accession it was assumed that she would marry quickly and would make her theology plain. Instead she maddened a succession of suitors by her alternations of enthusiasm and procrastination, and kept Rome guessing for eleven years until the pope finally lost patience and excommunicated her. The devotional practices of her private chapel were too papist for many of her advisers, yet her public utterances abound with references to Catholics as enemies and traitors. Her celebrated quatrain on Christ's words at the Last Supper, "This is my body," is a masterpiece of ambiguity. This edition prints an earlier text than the familiar one:

> 'Twas Christ the Word that spake it.
> The same took bread and brake it,
> And as the Word did make it,
> So I believe and take it.

"As" and "so" are conditionals which neatly sidestep the doctrine of transubstantiation, while not ruling it out. By contrast, during a procession through London the day before her coronation, she was offered a Bible in English, and, an eyewitness commented, "how reverently did she with both her hands take it, kiss it, and lay it upon her breast, to the great comfort of the lookers-on!" Word and sacrament were played off against each other in what we have now learned to call the Elizabethan settlement. The Mass was abolished by the Act of Uniformity in 1559, but the prayer book issued that same year omitted the more extreme Protestant touches of its 1552 predecessor, and in many ways religious practice harked back more to the end of Henry VIII's reign than to the end of Edward VI's. There seems nothing in the prayers which Elizabeth composed in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian as well as English to which her half-brother, or even her father, could not have said "Amen."

About her marriage the queen was no less ambiguous. Parliament repeatedly petitioned her to take a husband: she responded with indignation at such presumption. As the editors make clear, however, her speeches exist in various versions, even the earliest of which may have been written down, either by her or someone else, after oral delivery, so that we cannot be quite certain about their accuracy. (This was not an unusual practice; it also occurred, for instance, in the case of Donne's sermons.) The printed version of her first speech to Parliament in 1559 quotes her as saying, "I am already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you"; but earlier manuscript versions contain nothing so blunt. In 1566, responding to another petition, which foolishly threatened the withholding of subsidies if she did not marry, she drafted part of her speech herself, in excoriating terms:

> When I call to mind how far from dutiful care, yea, rather how nigh a traitorous trick this tumbling cast did spring, I muse how men of wit can so hardly use that gift they hold. I marvel not much that bridleless colts do not know their rider's hand, whom bit of kingly rein did never snaffle yet.

But an anonymous reporter of the speech tones this down, having her assure her auditors that she attributes no malice to them. Was the fragment a first draft, later revised in a more temperate frame of mind,

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or was it, as the editors believe, scribbled to vent her frustration after she had actually delivered the more tactful speech? No evidence is produced either way, but this is not a matter of purely textual interest; it bears upon the way in which the queen's public role was conceived and constructed. As the editors admit, this was often a collaborative business, with secretaries and civil servants intervening in the shaping of a text. Politics in this period is publicly framed, gestural as much as ideological.

Elizabeth could on occasion write a terse, muscular prose, infused with the alliterative habit reaching back to Old English literature, and possessing a fine rhythmic swing. That brings us to the question of the literary value of these documents. For reasons given above, it would be misleading to think of them as personally revealing to any great extent. Elizabeth did not wear her heart upon her sleeve, or in any other easily visible place. Her letters, even those to possible husbands such as the Duke of Alençon, are diplomatic pronouncements rather than spontaneous effusions. Fluent in six languages and formidably well read, she was a true child of her humanist education; that education insisted on the prince's need to subordinate artistic skills to utility of purpose. She says herself, "I studied nothing else but divinity till I came to the crown, and then I gave myself to the study of that which was meet for government." Obedience to her vocation came first, and duty was more important than desire.

The editors seek to place Elizabeth's work in the context of the recent rediscovery, by feminist critics, of women writers in the Renaissance. Needless to say, they are not interested in the question of whether these texts are worth reading, because "revised assumptions about literary value have enlarged and expanded the traditional canon," or, to put it less suavely, the goalposts have been moved. Yet, to those whose assumptions remain obstinately unrevised, it is still not clear that the dramas of Elizabeth Cary or Mary Wroth, the poems of Aemilia Lanyer or Mary Sidney, must automatically constitute significant achievements because of the sex of their authors (a point equally applicable, of course, to works by men). That is not to deny their historical value, but such a concession will not appease their defenders for whom the distinction between historical and literary value is a chimera. Sadly, I cannot feel that the writings of Queen Elizabeth rank among the glories of Elizabethan literature. Cranmer wrote better prayers, Shakespeare wrote better political speeches, and almost everybody wrote better poems.

This is simply explained. As stated earlier, Elizabeth was not writing as a woman of letters, but as a monarch with practical ends in view, to which aesthetic considerations were secondary. There are two possible exceptions to that statement, neither of which is included in this edition. The queen's Latin and Greek orations, many of which were extemporized, were celebrated for their stylistic and rhetorical virtuosity. We are given translations of them here, so those qualities remain inaccessible—although we are promised an edition of the originals. The second exception is the queen's own translations from Seneca, Boethius, Plutarch, and Horace, which really were private, written with no thought of wider circulation. They are omitted because of pressure of space, but a companion volume is much to be desired.[1] The absence of the translation of Boethius, which was undertaken when Elizabeth was sixty, is a particular disappointment. *De consolatione philosophiae* has the distinction of having been translated by two English monarchs, King Alfred being the other. I suspect that Elizabeth may have been drawn to it because its ambiguous character, neither wholly pagan nor unequivocally Christian, answered to something in her own temperament. As she worked on the concluding

1 The translations were published as *Queen Elizabeth's Englishings*, edited by Caroline Pemberton, by the Early English Text Society (1899). So far as I know, this remains the standard edition.

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book, with its grand reconciliation of the apparently contradictory doctrines of predestination and free will, she may well have reflected on the miraculous good fortune—or was it destiny?—which had preserved her for the throne. Even in this case, however, one cannot claim much for her version as a readable work of literature.

Elizabeth labored to gain her people's love, and she remains one of the most popular and admired of British monarchs. When British history was still taught in British schools, one of the images everyone carried away was that of the queen in armor, rousing the troops at Tilbury Dock before they sailed against the Armada. The editors do not share the doubts of some recent historians about the authenticity both of the armor and the speech, and they duly print the famous cadences:

> I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too—and take foul scorn that Parma or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm.

Nothing like this was heard again from a British leader until 1940, and nothing like it has been heard since. Rising nimbly above gender stereotyping with her Amazonian costume and imagery, Elizabeth is here incontestably a great human being, and a great sovereign. Perhaps she was not particularly interested in being a great writer as well. That, after all, could be left to her subjects.

Faking O'Neill

Stephen A. Black Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy. Yale University Press, 543 pages, $29.95.

reviewed by Herb Greer

Eugene O'Neill was one of those figures in American arts and letters whose principal stock in trade was domestic agony. His best work came from being the youngest son of a respectable but dysfunctional American Irish Catholic family. As a boy, Eugene learned about the theater through his father, one of the most famous actors of his time. The future playwright spent his adolescence as an enthusiastic rakehell, partial to drink, whores, and lowlife companions. These tastes, combined with a deliberate failure to complete his Princeton education, a bout of tuberculosis, and a spell in the merchant navy, seemed to point toward a short, dirty, and deliberately proletarian life.

But O'Neill also had a taste for literature, especially poetry and plays; his early life on tour with his father had added to this an easy familiarity with theatrical techniques. In 1912, after spending six months in a sanatorium recovering from tuberculosis, O'Neill decided to become a playwright. He threw himself into the task, completing thirteen plays in two years. In 1916, he began his long association with the Provincetown Players, which produced many of these one-act plays.

O'Neill's was a rather limited literary talent (his prose is often awkward and his poems range from amateurish to crude), but the shows, drawn mostly from his sea voyages and his painful family life, had a vitality and fire that caught the imagination of audiences. He won three Pulitzer Prizes and then, in 1936, the Nobel Prize.

Such a figure was bound to attract a cloud of biographers and analysts. What made him stand out among his contemporaries was a ferocious determination to grasp and exploit the painful events in his own family life. O'Neill's work was spurred by a peculiarity of character that made him, in Louis Sheaffer's description, "an emotional haemophiliac." His only real predecesor in emotional ruthlessness was the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, whose plays had had a profound influence on O'Neill's approach to theater (and writing).

The best of the biographical works about O'Neill are the intelligent and sympathetic

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treatment by Arthur and Barbara Gelb (1962, though currently being revised and expanded to three volumes) and the excellent biography by Louis Sheaffer (1968). These tell the reader almost everything worth knowing about O'Neill and his work.

Stephen A. Black's *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy* is another matter altogether. Black is both a professor of English at a Canadian university and a trained psychoanalyst. He began work on this biography at the same time that he began nine years of academic and clinical training at the Seattle Psychoanalytic Institute. The vast majority of his factual material appears to have been gleaned from the Gelb and Sheaffer biographies. Black says in his introduction that he avoided interviewing anyone who had known O'Neill "on the grounds that personal accounts by witnesses might seem more vivid than the published testimony of the dead and so might bring additional sources of bias to the project." Additional to what, he does not say, but it rapidly becomes obvious. What Black has done is to take a broad selection of information about O'Neill's life and pour it, so to speak, in an arbitrarily liquified form into a mold formed from various psychoanalytic elements. The result is an awful warning to those who still suppose that the genre of psychobiography has anything sound to offer.

Black's thesis is that O'Neill "spent most of his writing life in mourning." He explains the process of that mourning in psychoanalytic object-relations theory jargon: subject and object, distinguishing "me" from "not-me," and so on. Black speculates wildly about the motives, feelings, and other dynamics animating O'Neill and his family and friends. It would be tedious to give a long list of such instances; at a rough estimate, they make up about three-quarters of everything he has not taken from Gelb and Sheaffer or other printed sources. But one incident in particular stands out as characteristic of Black's approach:

> Eugene believed or had heard that in the months between Edmund's death and his own conception his mother underwent a "series of brought-on abortions."
>
> The knowledge [*sic*] of the series of pregnancies said to have been aborted between 1885 and 1887 leads one to wonder whether there had been abortions during the five years between Jamie's birth and Edmund's birth.

Black is asking the reader to believe that a highly conventional and devoutly Catholic nineteenth-century American lace-curtain Irish wife and mother, on tour and living cheek by jowl with her deeply Catholic and very famous Irish-American husband, managed to procure not just one, but several illegal abortions without his knowledge or consent and with no obvious physical aftereffects. Black says this proposition—the "hunch" of a son whose business is dramatic fantasy and who, it is well known, resented his mother bitterly—has "the ring of something always known and accepted as true." He seems to sense the absurdity of the claim, but nevertheless tries to justify it:

> The sheer logistical problem of arranging abortions, probably without her husband's knowledge, while traveling about the country, would have defeated many people. But with the resourcefulness of the truly desperate, she apparently found ways. Eugene's hunch is plausible.

Subsequently these putative abortions are treated as solid fact and used as an element in Black's psychoanalysis.

This approach is the model for Black's treatment of O'Neill's inner (and much of his outer) life and its effect on the plays. Nothing escapes Black's speculation. His text is riddled with terms such as "seems," "it is likely," "probably," "possibly," "must have been," "one might say," "unconsciously," and the like, always preceding some allusion to motives, feelings, or other details that the author could not possibly have known to be true or for which he has

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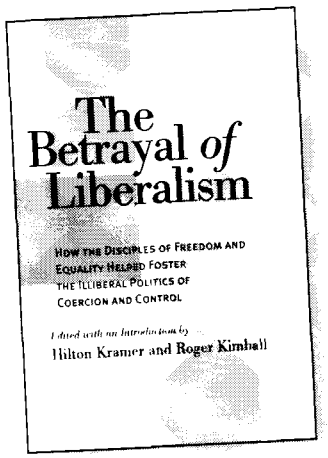
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no hard evidence, but which are subsequently treated as fact, bearing fundamentally upon his analysis of O'Neill's life and work. Black remarks in his introduction that "Distinguishing subject from object (me from not-me) is one of the necessary achievements of human development in the first 20 or 30 years of life." There is a corollary to that in literary (and especially theatrical) criticism: one of the necessary achievements of the métier is to distinguish the work of the artist from the vicissitudes of his personal life. These may of course affect the work, but they do not prevent the best of it from transcending the peculiar problems of the artist as an individual. Black has, in effect, reduced O'Neill's work to a mere function of his personal pathology, and so trivialized it.

Black's years as a professor of literature have not saved him from some strange ideas. For example, he seems to believe that *Oedipus at Colonus* is a comedy. The difference between tragedy and comedy, he thinks, is that "in comedy individuals are not taken so seriously." If he knew anything about how the theater functions and how a playwright's craft of selection and shaping actually works (on the evidence of this book he understands almost nothing of either), he might have been able to offer some useful comment on the twists in O'Neill's writing: on his curious use of English in dialogue, which can sound like a bad translation from some other language; on his occasional tone-deafness to the musical ebb and flow of conversation, remarkable in a man whose work was still impressive enough to grip audiences and eventually to win the Nobel Prize.

Most of all Black might have noted that O'Neill, despite his reputation as a writer of "tragedy" (much stressed in this book), was not really that at all. An authentic writer of tragedy is like the classical actor in Shaw's definition:

> He can present a dramatic hero as a man whose passions . . . have produced the philosophy, the poetry, the art, and the state-craft of

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> the world, and not merely those which have produced its weddings, coroners' inquests, and executions.

Anyone who is familiar with O'Neill's work will know that it belongs almost entirely to the latter half of that quotation. His excursions into the territory of high theatrical symbolism, like those of Strindberg, proved to be clumsy. O'Neill's attempt to translate the majesty and poetic power of Greek myths into a totally different American culture and idiom was a brave failure. Much of his dialogue now has the dated metallic thunk of experimental period pieces. For instance, the Sandburg-style rhetoric in *The Hairy Ape* can be (just about) played as stylized theater, but it still sounds wooden and windily over-written today. It evokes the memory of O'Neill's preference for plays in his head as opposed to performance on the stage.

Nevertheless, Eugene O'Neill is secure on his plinth as one of the towering figures in American theater. He remains the first of our playwrights to be respected as a serious literary figure (though not the first to be internationally successful). The great plays based on O'Neill's dysfunctional family lay bare and dissect as few others have done the rocky, dangerous terrain of harsh domestic tensions. In tone and detail O'Neill has a broader sweep and greater emotional depth than his Scandinavian master, and—as recent productions have shown—his late plays remain formidable achievements. They—and the man who crafted them—deserve better than the self-serving academic fakery and psychobabble which smothers the reader of this awful book.

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Letters

The difficulty with Hegel

To the Editors:
Roger Kimball's comments on Hegel in your September issue raise troubling questions. Surely Mr. Kimball would not think that a major writer should be treated in the classroom solely with quips, slogans, mockery, and appeals to mob taste, and he knows that versions of such handling are rampant in the academy today. Why does he stoop to such tactics in his contribution to a journal that claims to have an interest in conserving high standards of judgment in cultural matters? Evidently he thinks Hegel's stylistic and conceptual peculiarities warrant an approach that will delight every impatient sophomore, who will readily agree with his satire. It surely takes much less effort and thought to follow Mr. Kimball than to tackle Hegel seriously.

Mr. Kimball adds to one's perplexity by his praise of Bertrand Russell's "common sense" critique of Hegel. One does not have to be a Hegelian (and I surely am not one) to see that Russell is a lesser thinker, by far. Should one assume that Mr. Kimball admires the common sense of Russell's lifelong pacifism, atheism, socialism, and amoral views on love and marriage? Does he applaud the common sense of demonstrating in the streets with Jean-Paul Sartre in opposition to Western armament against Communism? Hegel scorned contemporary versions of such things, it is true, and Mr. Kimball has picked an ally who consistently stands in all respects as a foe of Hegel. My question then is whether it makes sense for Mr. Kimball to call himself a "cultural conservative." Since Mr. Kimball reveals such lack of discrimination in judging philosophers, he might do well to avoid writing about them. In the present instance he comes off sounding like the silliest of academic deconstructors of culture, and even looking rather Red-faced.

Richard Velkley
The Catholic University of America

Roger Kimball replies
Professor Velkley's letter provides a salutary warning about the mental consequences of taking Hegel too seriously. One consequence is a species of logical anesthesia—not numbing, like Novocain, but giddy-making, like laughing gas. Professor Velkley is exercised by my quoting with approval Bertrand Russell's famous attack on Hegel. "Should one assume," he asks, that I also admire Russell's "pacifism, atheism," etc.? Not at all, professor. One should assume no such thing. That would be very bad logic. To say that Russell made telling criticisms of Hegel's philosophy in no way implies admiration for Russell's character, politics, his views on religion, or even his habits of personal hygiene. Surely a professor of philosophy, even one who defends Hegel, should be able to grasp the distinction. I also cite attacks on Hegel—several much nastier than Russell's—by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Santayana, Leszek Kolakowski, and David Stove, among others. What should one "assume" about those criticisms? Could it, just possibly, be that they are *right*—that Hegel, as Schopenhauer put

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it, really was a "charlatan," an "intellectual Caliban," whose "sham wisdom" and "sheer nonsense" "had previously been heard only in madhouses"?

Professor Velkley's main point seems to be that because Hegel is regarded by the academic establishment as a "major writer" he should therefore by exempt from criticism—or at least from "quips, slogans, mockery, and appeals to mob taste." I disagree. When an emperor is naked, I believe it is the duty of critics, particularly those interested in "conserving high standards of judgment," to say so, the more vividly the better. Although I happen to have misspent many hours in my youth "tackling" Hegel, I see now that Kierkegaard was right. An appropriate response to Hegel, he said, does not require extensive training in philosophy. "All that is needed is sound common sense, a fund of humor, and a little Greek ataraxy [tranquillity]."

As for Professor Velkley's "impatient sophomores": it would be most gratifying to think that I had delighted them. Their impatience is eminently justified.

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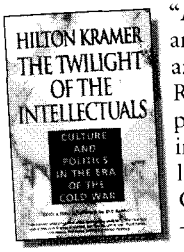

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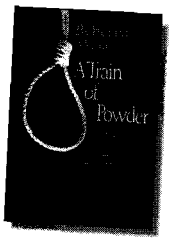

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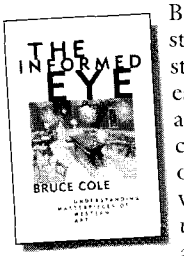

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